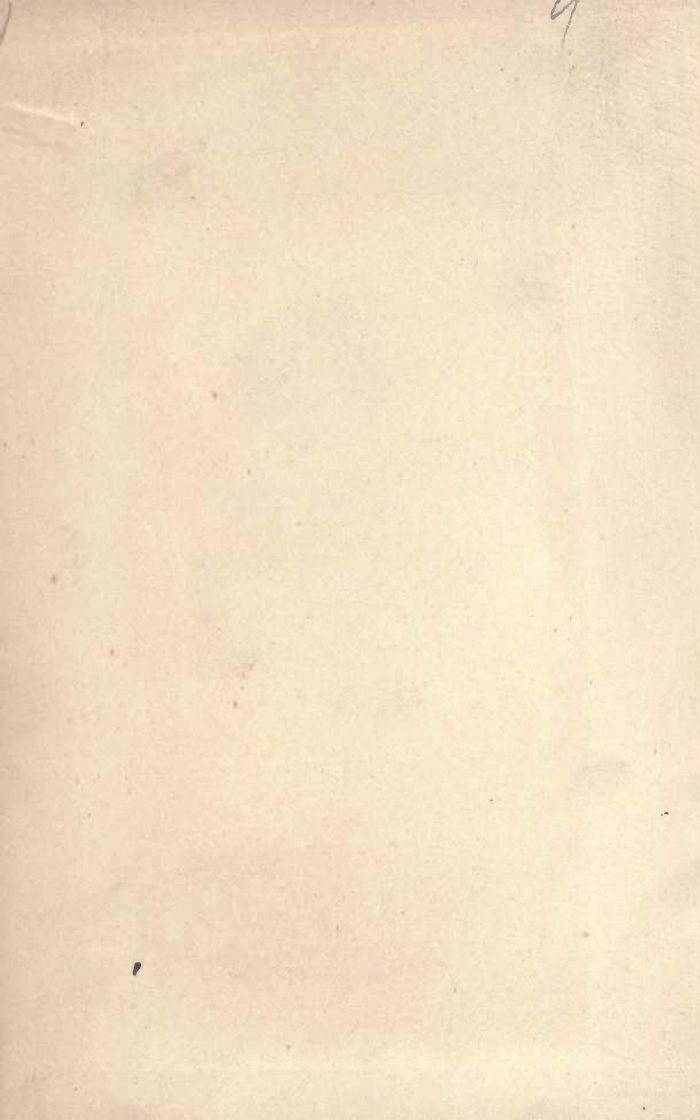


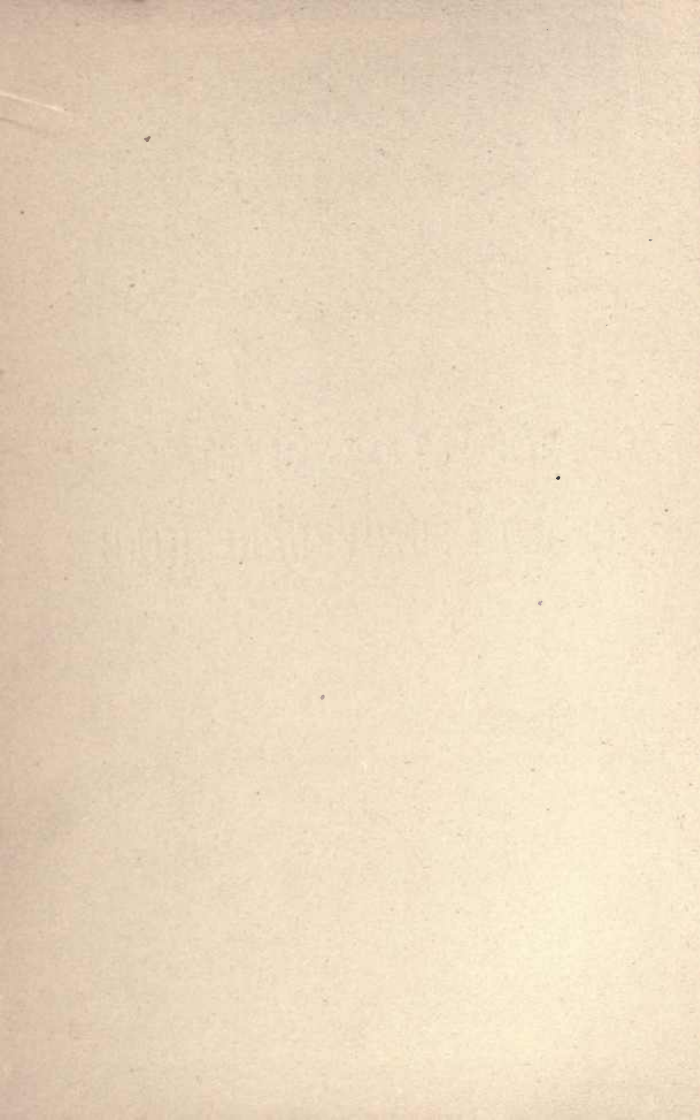


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SPORTSMAN AND NATURALIST'S
TOUR IN SUTHERLANDSHIRE



A SPORTSMAN AND NATURALIST'S
TOUR IN SUTHERLANDSHIRE

BY
CHARLES ST. JOHN

Author of "Wild Sports and Natural History of the Highlands," &c.

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PREFACE.

IT is with real diffidence that I offer this volume to the public. I am induced to do so by the wishes of many of my friends and companions in the woods and fields, who, having received with indulgence my former volume on Highland Sports, have persuaded me to launch another barque laden with a similar cargo of odds and ends. That it should have as favourable voyage as its predecessor, is more than I can venture to hope. If, however, these pages serve to entertain for a few hours any of my fellow-lovers of nature, or if any whose occupations in life are of a graver and more laborious kind, find relaxation and amusement in their perusal, my object is fully gained.

I do not fear the criticism of the learned ; my flight is far too humble to obtain even their censure : nor do I aim at instructing any of my readers, but solely at amusing them. The scientific naturalist

must excuse my errors of description and my want of skill: but thus far, and thus far only, I can venture to say a good word in favour of my rough notes—that they are the result of actual and personal observation, and not of hearsay or second-hand information; and that, therefore, some reliance may be placed in them.

The present volume consists of extracts from a Journal, written during a wandering excursion through Sutherlandshire, one of the most interesting counties in Scotland, and one of the least known, of a series of field-notes for each month in the year, written during my residence in the pleasant land of Moray, and of a few miscellaneous chapters on matters of interest to the sportsman. Such as they are, I offer them to the public, trusting that they will receive them as the off-hand thoughts and observations of one who is more accustomed to the hill-side than to the study—to the gun than to the pen.

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A Sportsman and Naturalist's TOUR IN SUTHERLANDSHIRE.

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Sutherlandshire; its Wild Birds not sufficiently known—Our Start and Conveyance—Kyle of Sutherland—Woods of Rosehall; old Keeper there; his Recollection of me—Oykel Inn—Altan-nan-ealgach; Origin of Name; Fishing at—Conveying Boat to Loch Urigil—Wild Geese and Divers on the Loch—Large Trout of these Lakes—Drive to Inchnadamph—Value of Rare Eggs—Heronry—Peregrine Falcon and Buzzards' Nests—Climbing over the Rocks.

AMONGST the thousands of scenery-hunters and tourists there are very few who have ever made an excursion through the county of Sutherland, although it is a district as interesting as any in Europe, both for its magnificent and varied scenery, including sea, mountain, valley, and lake, and also as containing many rare subjects interesting to the naturalist and botanist. There are many birds and plants to be found in the wilder parts of this county which are scarcely to be seen elsewhere in Britain. The naturalist may here observe closely the eagle, the osprey, the wild goose, and many other birds, whose habits are little known, but who in this region breed and rear their young in comparative security.

The wild cat, marten cat, fox, &c., though seldom seen by daylight, are still tolerably numerous where the ground is not kept for grouse-shooting. In the latter case, however, traps and poison have pretty well destroyed these and all other carnivorous animals.

In the spring of 1848 I made an excursion through some part of the county of Sutherland, which I shall endeavour to describe, in the hope of inducing others to follow my example, being confident that whoever does so will find himself amply repaid for his trouble.

My object in making the journey was to enjoy the magnificent scenery of the north coast, to see and observe

the breeding habits and localities of many of the rarer birds of Britain, and to ascertain the fact of some of these birds rearing their young in Scotland, which, from the contradictory and uncertain statements of many naturalists, seemed to be a matter of great doubt. Not being a collector of eggs or birds myself, I had no wish to destroy more of my feathered friends than sufficed to prove their identity, and to procure a few specimens for a gentleman who is as great a lover of nature as myself, and a far more scientific one.

Our start from Bonar Bridge was a most amusing affair, not only to ourselves, but also to all the inhabitants of that small but beautifully situated village. The vehicle which we travelled in was a small and lightly built flat-bottomed boat, made of larch, and mounted on wheels. It was constructed to ship and unship in half a minute. By simply unscrewing two bolts, it could be taken off its wheels and launched into the water. Being on springs, it made a very easy carriage, and was large enough to hold four persons, with plenty of space for luggage. On the present occasion our party consisted of a friend of mine, Mr. J., who (although for many years a wanderer over Switzerland and many parts of Europe) had never been through the wilder and more mountainous regions of Scotland; Mr. Dunbar, whose assistance was of much use as a naturalist and interpreter amongst the shepherds and others who spoke more Gaelic than English; myself, and Leo, my retriever.

Having adjusted the harness, traces, &c., of the boat to my horse (a stout Highland "garron"), we started at an early hour, trusting to the chapter of accidents and the pace of our horse as to where we should sleep that night, but determined to make out as many miles as we could, or in other words to advance as far as possible into the mountainous part of Sutherlandshire. Bonar Bridge is situated on what is called the Kyle of Sutherland; a narrow estuary formed by the confluence of the Shin, Oykel, Casselia, and Anak rivers, all of which streams, a short distance above Bonar Bridge, meet the salt water of the Dornoch Firth. In winter this water abounds with wild fowl, but now (May 14) all these birds had gone to their breeding-places with the exception of a solitary goodwit or two, who seemed to have been left behind the rest of their comrades, this bird not breeding in Scotland. The woods about Rosehall, or rather that portion of them which the axe has spared, used to abound in many

kinds of interesting hawks, and also in marten and wild cats, but keepers and trapping combined seem to have entirely swept all these animals away. I looked in vain for buzzards on a high rock which some few years back was invariably tenanted by them, but it seemed that they had long since been destroyed. As I passed through the remains of the woods too I caught a glimpse here and there of passes where different stags had fallen to my rifle, and many a happy day spent in the greenwood was recalled to my recollection, with all its accompanying incidents. I called on the old Highland keeper who was then my attendant, and found him exactly on the same spot where I had seen him twelve years ago, winking at the morning sun in a manner peculiar to owls and inhabitants of cottages full of peat smoke. I doubted his recognizing me after so many years, but was much gratified at the pleasure and readiness with which he did so, and at the vivid recollection which he had of the corrie in which "my honour" had shot my first stag under his guidance and tuition—his tender inquiry too after my rifle, "the likes of which never put down a deer in the country." I returned the compliment by begging to be shown my old acquaintance, "the double-barrel," a most venerable flint gun, with singularly eccentric and unreachable triggers, which no fore-finger but his own could ever pull. This ancient gun, however, in *his* hands, had laid low many an antlered head. Though he affected to despise all new inventions, I had a recollection of his always preferring a shot with one of my percussion guns to the uncertain chance of his own flint and steel. Many an old story connected with stag and corrie, shealing and whisky bottle, the old fellow called to my recollection; and I really saw with regret the last of his weather-beaten face, as he bowed and gesticulated to me as long as we continued in sight. I am afraid that my companions must have thought me a bore for a few miles, as I pointed out, with an interest which they could scarcely feel, rock and glen, the scenes of former chases of deer, or even of the death of otter or wild cat.

At Oykel Inn, some twenty miles from our starting-place, we stopped for an hour or two to rest our horse, and to try a cast in the river; but bright and clear as it was, with very little water in the stream, we had no success. At certain times of the fishing season there is no better river than the Oykel. May, however, is rather too early.

Eleven miles farther on we came to a small inn, at a place called Altan-nan-cealgach,—a most difficult and unpronounceable Gaelic name, and one which I cannot be sure of spelling right. The meaning of it is the “Burn of the Deceiver.” The origin of the name, as it was told me, is amusing and characteristic enough. The place is situated in a part of Ross-shire which intrudes into the adjoining county of Sutherland in a very unceremonious manner, the cause of which was as follows:—In a dispute between the respective proprietors of that part of Ross-shire and Sutherlandshire, the marches were to be determined by reference to an old inhabitant, who, being either by clanship or bribery in the interest of the Ross-shire laird, came to this spot to decide the question with the soles of his shoes filled with earth from the interior of Ross-shire, the wily old fellow by this means saving himself all scruples of conscience when he swore most positively that he stood on Ross-shire ground. Standing on Ross-shire ground in this manner, he pointed out a boundary most convenient to his employer, the Ross-shire laird. So ran the tale as it was told me; and *unde derivatur* the name of Altan-nan-cealgach, which it still holds.

Close to the door of the inn is a fine loch, in which are great numbers of small trout and char, and also plenty of the large lake-trout, or *Salmo ferox*. We fished for an hour or two, and caught a good dish of trout, and one char; a very unusual occurrence, as the char rarely rises to the fly, except in one or two favoured localities. Indeed I have caught hundreds of trout with the fly in lochs swarming with char, without ever catching one of the latter. Though not much accustomed to travellers, the good wife of the inn put us up comfortably enough. We had clean beds, and good tea, eggs, and cream, which, with the excellent trout that we had taken, made us quite comfortable. The only thing wanting was hay (corn they had in plenty); but I soon remedied that want by shackling the horse's fore legs with a couple of dog-straps, and turning him loose in the short sweet grass by the edge of the lake.

On the following morning, at the instigation of one of our party, who was very anxious to procure some eggs of the black-throated diver (*Colymbus arcticus*), we started for Loch Urigil, a lake about two miles from the inn. Our first step was to launch our boat in the lake, close to the door; and having crossed this piece of water, we dragged the boat out

again, and, mounting it on our shoulders, carried it across the hill to the other lake. Little, however, had we reckoned on the distance we had to go.

"How far is the lake from here?" was our inquiry on leaving the water-side.

"Oh, just ower yonder brae," was the answer of the innkeeper, as he pointed to a height a few hundred yards off.

"How far do you say?"

"Just a wee bit."

But that weary "wee bit" of the innkeeper's! Many an anathema was poured on the head of our guide before we had got the boat fairly afloat in Loch Urigil. Once there, however, our cares were soon forgotten. My friend put his fishing-rod together; while I, accompanied by Mr. Dunbar, went off in the boat to the islands on the lake, in order to see what birds were breeding there. We first made for a small island covered with the brightest green foliage that I ever saw, which, however, turned out to be nothing but the wild leek. The nature of the plant was most unpleasantly forced upon my observation by the very strong scent the leaves produced when trodden upon.

There were three of these beautiful birds (the black-throated diver) on the loch, but no eggs. On some of the other islands were a number of wild geese (*Anser ferus*), the original kind from which our common domestic goose is derived. They had two or three nests on one island, but we found no eggs. Their nests were large and quite exposed; consisting of a large mass of down, kept together by coarse grass and herbage. The old birds, when disturbed, flew off the island, some of them alighting on the loch, and others on the short green grass about the edge of the water, where they commenced grazing after the manner of tame geese. Having procured one or two specimens of the black-throated diver, I landed, and sat down to enjoy the magnificent scenery and all its accompaniments. The pewit, redshank, curlew, and golden plover kept up a constant warfare of clamour against me for some time, till, finding that I did not molest them, they gradually returned to their domestic occupations. All these birds had probably eggs near the spot. After a short time they ran and walked about fearlessly, quite regardless of my being so near them; while the lively and restless little dunlin ran almost over my feet without fear, as I sat near the edge of the loch.

The mountains of Coirgach and Assynt, some of which I could see from Loch Urigil, are of a very striking and peculiar form, standing out boldly and independently from the lower hills that surrounded them. Occasionally a curlew would come wheeling over my head, uttering its loud cry of alarm and warning, something between a whistle and a scream; but he soon sailed back to his mate on the sloping moss that covered the hill-side near the lake. A beautiful cock grouse came down within a few yards of me, and picked about amongst the stones at the edge of the water, occasionally stopping as if to exhibit himself as he stood erect with his bright-red comb raised to its utmost height. When at last he saw me, instead of seeming alarmed, he rose and alighted again on a small hillock only a few feet further off, and stood there some minutes watching me closely, and then flew off, crowing a short distance up the heather. The grey geese seemed in constant motion, sometimes feeding and sometimes flying after each other in pairs with loud cries.

After waiting some time about the edge of the loch, I rejoined my companions, and we again renewed our portage of the boat over that weary hill. I had left a line with several hooks baited with small trout in the lake near the inn, and on returning found a *salmo ferox* which weighed something above two pounds on it. While taking in the line, a monster trout ran at the fish already caught, and, notwithstanding its size, nearly swallowed it, leaving the marks of his teeth in the shape of deep cuts across the middle of the two-pound trout. I should like to have seen the fish at closer quarters who made an attack on such a goodly-sized bait, as he must have been a perfect fresh-water shark. There can be no doubt that in some of these lakes, where the water is deep and the food plentiful, these trout must grow to a size not yet ascertained. None of these lakes have ever been properly fished. A few days' trolling can never be depended on as a proof of the size of the fish in them, more particularly as we all know that the larger a trout is, the less inclined is he to take any bait. I will leave it for others to judge of the size of a trout that could nearly swallow one of his own species weighing considerably above two pounds.

During our drive to Inchnadamph in the afternoon we had a fine view of Benmore of Assynt, and numerous other magnificent mountains, grey and dreary, and with but little vegetation of any kind, although along the edges of the lakes

and streams there is always a certain width of bright green herbage, where the sheep at this season find plenty of good grazing. The long ranges of cliff-like rocks near Inchnadamph are very splendid in their height and shape, and are frequented by buzzards, ravens, grey crows, and a pair of peregrine falcons. Notwithstanding all these enemies, the ring-ousel sings from every green corner of the rocks, while wheatears (safer perhaps from their smaller size and their habit of dodging under the stones) are extremely numerous everywhere along the road side. At Inchnadamph we arrived late in the evening, and found a comfortable, clean inn, an obliging landlord, and all the accompaniments that one could wish to refresh both mind and body (I am afraid that the former is sadly dependent on the latter), at the end of rather a hard and long day's work, for we had been actively employed from daylight.

The black-throated diver (*Colymbus arcticus*) is a peculiarly beautiful and singularly marked bird. Though generally rare, in certain localities which happen to be adapted to its habits this bird is not unfrequently to be found during the breeding season. It invariably breeds on some small, flat island in an inland lake; it prefers, and indeed is seldom found except in, lakes which lie in a flat or open part of the country, and which have shallows and grassy creeks, as it feeds more on frogs, leeches, and similar productions of such places, than on the trout that frequent the more stony and deeper parts of the lake. Apparently from the position of its legs and feet, this diver cannot walk on land, and therefore places her eggs within a very few feet of the water's edge on a flat island where it can reach them by a kind of waddling, seal-like motion. I never found above two eggs in a nest, and do not believe that they ever lay more, although I have been told of three having been procured. The egg is of a long and regular oval form, and large; the colour is a fine rich brown green with darker spots. This bird appears to have great difficulty in rising from the water on a calm day, and sometimes nothing will induce it to fly, although when once on wing it flies strong and high. When two or more are in company I have never seen them rise; they appear then to trust more to diving for safety; but when a black-throated diver is alone, he will frequently take to flight most unexpectedly and leave the loch altogether. Unluckily, the very great beauty of its plumage, and the rarity and

difficulty of procuring it, make this interesting bird an object of pursuit amongst bird-stuffers and collectors, and this, combined with the price offered for its eggs by egg collectors, will soon entirely extirpate it from all its present breeding-places.

The cry of this diver is loud, peculiar, and mournful, and it has acquired the local name of rain-goose among the Highlanders, owing to its habit of uttering its croaking call with great perseverance before rain or stormy weather. Its other local and Gaelic names signify the loch hen, and the great loch hen, in distinction to the red-throated diver, which is also frequently found in this county. The latter bird (*Colymbus septentrionalis*) is much commoner, and is neither so large nor handsome a bird as the former. It is also distinguished readily by the light brownish red neck. The red-throated diver breeds often near small pools and lochs, and lays its eggs more frequently on the shore of the mainland surrounding the loch than on an island. It is not so shy a bird as the black-throated diver, but not being so much valued by collectors, has, I hope, a chance of existing some time yet as an inhabitant of Britain during the breeding season.

I found that all the shepherds, gamekeepers, and others in this remote part of the kingdom had already ascertained the value of the eggs of this and other rare birds, and were as eager to search for them, and as loth to part with them (excepting at a very high price), as love of gain could make them. Nor had they the least scruple in endeavouring to impose eggs under fictitious names on any person wishing to purchase such things. Indeed I am very sure that many of the eggs sold by London dealers are acquired in this way, and are not to be in the least depended on as to their identity.

I was told of a singular heronry situated on a lake between Oykel and the inn at Altan-nan-cealgach, where the herons breed in great numbers on the ground in an island on the loch. The place being situated at some distance from the road, I had not time to look for it, much as I should have liked to have seen the heron building in such a situation; but, as we drove along, I saw several herons winging their heavy flight towards the place where I was told this lake was situated.

Before we started from Inchnadamph, wishing to procure some eggs of the peregrine falcon, who bred in the cliff near

the inn, I procured the assistance of two or three people, one of whom, a young man, son of the innkeeper, volunteered to go over the face of the rock with a rope round his waist, we holding it from above. As it was not only rainy but extremely windy, I was not very willing for him to do so. However, as he seemed quite confident in the steadiness of his own head and footing, we prepared to perform our share of the work. Having fastened the rope securely round his body below his arms, we lowered him gradually over the summit, immediately above the nest of the buzzard. He was provided also with two or three joints of a fishing-rod, and a kind of tin soup-ladle (bearing in this country the quaint name of a "kail-divider"), which was fixed into the small end of his rod. The use of this was to enable him to spoon the eggs out of the nest, in case it was placed, as the nests of these birds often are, so far under a shelf of a rock as to be inaccessible without some such contrivance. Over he went then without the smallest hesitation or nervousness, notwithstanding the slippery state of the whole rock and the violence of the wind. We lowered yard by yard of the rope, till he looked like a spider hanging at the end of its thread. He then was quite lost to our view, having scrambled under some projecting rocks to reach the nest. After a few anxious moments, he gave the agreed upon signal for being drawn up, and I must say that I was rejoiced when his head appeared again safe above the edge of the cliff, holding in his teeth his cap, in which he had deposited the eggs. We found that the peregrine's nest would have been quite inaccessible even to our experienced and bold climber but for his long spoon.

All the time that we had been engaged at the buzzard's nest two pair of hawks were hovering about us, keeping certainly at a respectful distance. It was interesting to observe the different flights of the two kinds of hawk—the buzzards sailing to and fro with slow but powerful wing, and wheeling in large circles; while the peregrines dashed about, turning with rapid and sudden swoops, sometimes below us, and sometimes suddenly shooting high up into the mist, when we could only tell their exact situation by their shrill and angry cries. The buzzards uttered a kind of low complaining cry, of quite a different expression and note, as they floated to and fro below us.

CHAPTER II.

Inn at Inchnadamph—Liberal System of the Duke of Sutherland—Facility of Travelling—Beauty of Country—Loch Assynt—Nest of Osprey—Large Spring of Water—Water Ousel—Dense Mist—Wild Country near Kylesku—Country between Kylesku and Scowrie—Nest of Osprey; curious position of—Eagle.

BEING under a good and liberal landlord is like being under a good and liberal government; and this we found to be the case at Inchnadamph, which is held under the Duke of Sutherland, or (as he is equally well known here) the “good Duke”—a title, by the way, his Grace may be prouder of than any other that could be invented. Throughout the Duke’s property here the innkeepers hold their houses (and capital ones they are) rent free, and have certain other advantages in hiring their land, and in having every encouragement that the most kind and judicious liberality of the proprietor can give them, on (I believe) the express condition that their inns should be decently kept, and the charges moderate. The consequence of which arrangement is, that strangers can travel through this otherwise wild and lonely country with every facility and comfort, and without the disagreeable feeling of being doubly overcharged because they *are* strangers. Nevertheless, with all this facility and comfort, but very few strangers *do* come to see this magnificent scenery, simply, I fancy, because it is little known, and not yet the fashion. Most visitors to the Highlands drive straight from their home in England, or elsewhere, to the ground which they have hired for grouse-shooting, or other sporting, and after a certain number of weeks drive straight back again. Very few travel here for the sake of seeing the wild scenery of the north and north-west part of the island, where there is little in the way of game to tempt sportsmen. To me, however, it is the most attractive part of Scotland; and the season I delight in most is during the months of June and July, when the sun scarcely dips below the horizon, and it is light during the whole night—light enough, indeed, to read small print with ease without the aid of candles, or even of the moon. Backed by that fine old-looking mountain Benmore of Assynt, the inn at Inchnadamph has for its front view the beautiful and extensive loch of Assynt, and one of the finest mountains in the North, called by a name that sounds like Ouvinnaighin. To my English ears, however, the name was quite unattainable. This mountain towards

its summit forms a singularly shaped cliff, round which I have generally seen one or two golden eagles soaring with strong and majestic flight.

At Loch Assynt, on a peninsula (once an island, and now occasionally so), there are ruins of an old castle. On the summit of the highest part of the wall is an immense pile of weather-beaten and bleached sticks, which two years ago formed an osprey's nest, but, unluckily, this most interesting bird has been killed or driven from its picturesque and exposed dwelling-place. Nothing could be more characteristic of the bird than this nest, perched on the highest corner of the ruin, overhanging the broad lake, which abounds with trout of all sizes. The *Salmo ferox*, or great lake trout, is more plentiful in Loch Assynt than in most Highland lakes. A short distance above the inn at Inchnadamph a spring rises from the limestone rocks which it is worth travelling from London to see. Direct from the ground bubbles up this spring with such power and abundance that it at once forms a goodly-sized brook of the most pure and transparent water that can be imagined. The smallest trout or the smallest pebbles are seen as clearly in its deepest pools as if no water intervened. So bright and clear are the streams flowing out of limestone, that they have rather the effect that a good glass has on a picture than that of making objects indistinct.

We started from Inchnadamph inn in good time in the morning, intending to reach Scowrie, about twenty-one miles distant; but the road being very hilly, and a ferry intervening, we had to reckon on many hours of travelling before we reached our night's quarters. I walked on to look at the osprey's nest on the old castle, and an interesting sight it is, though I lamented the absence of the birds. Why the poor osprey should be persecuted I know not, as it is quite harmless, living wholly on fish, of which every one knows that there is too great an abundance in this country for the most rigid preserver to grudge this picturesque bird his share. The fact probably is that his skin is worth something to keepers and others, as they can always get a few shillings for it, and therefore the bird is doomed to destruction. The "auri sacra fames" will soon put an end to his race in this country.

In the midst of a steep and tolerably high water-fall, perched on a small piece of projecting rock, and surrounded by the dashing water, I saw one of my favourite birds, the

water-ousel, his white breast conspicuous even amongst the white foam. A twisted birch, and a bunch of bright green fern growing out of the rock, constantly watered by the spray of the fall, made as pretty a little scene for a painter as I ever saw. Water-ousels seem to prefer picturesque dwelling-places, or rather, I suppose, they choose such spots as being better suited for placing their curious-shaped nest in than any other.

While I was examining a kind of simple but most serviceable stone-mill, used for grinding the stone of which these excellent roads are made, the carriage came up, and we proceeded. Coming to a road leading off the main one, and going straight up a hill northwards, Dunbar assured us that this was our route; so with rather an envious look at the straight, level road before us, which we were leaving, we turned our faces to the hill. After going about two miles, not quite perpendicularly (the way gradually getting worse), we suddenly came to an abrupt termination of the track. Through the driving mist, which had now become quite thick, we saw a most desolate-looking house some few hundred yards off, and there found that we had turned off the road too soon, and had to retrace our steps.

The next turning off was the right one, and we laboured again up the hill northwards, but with a better road. The higher we ascended the denser was the mist; and though we occasionally heard the grouse-cock crow pretty near us, we could see nothing, absolutely nothing, except the road under our feet.

I was amused by my friend's good-natured philosophy: when I lamented loudly the curtain of mist which was entirely shutting out the magnificent hill under which we were then passing, he comforted me by saying that he preferred almost the scene as it then was (the mist occasionally giving us a momentary peep at some grey rock, and then shutting it out), as it added a kind of mysterious interest to the wild scenery through which we were passing.

After working our weary way up hill for some time, we crossed the highest ridge of our road, and began to descend towards the ferry of Kylesku, by which we were to pass an arm of the sea that runs a considerable distance inland. As we came lower the mist gradually disappeared, and at last we were fairly out of it, although it remained as dense as ever above us, quite concealing all the higher grounds. I never

saw such a confusion of rock and stone as we passed through for some two or three miles. The rocks seemed to have been splintered and broken up by some great convulsion of the earth; all looking broken and angular, none of them wearing a round weather-worn appearance, or being much overgrown with heather or herbage.

Eagles are by no means scarce in this part of the country, but as they hunt principally in the higher districts, they are not seen so often as might be expected, excepting by an eye that is accustomed to them.

Having rested our horse and drank *tea* (the only meal we could get) at the ferry-house, we managed to persuade the landlord, who was also ferryman, to leave the hot whisky and water which he was drinking with some acquaintance of his own at that hour, twelve A.M., and ferry us across.

We entered into conversation with a shepherd on the north side of the ferry, who told us of a nest of the "Eagle Fisher," as he called it, on an island in a loch not very far from the road; so we appointed the man to meet us the following morning at a certain place, and drove on to Scowrie, through a succession of the most wild and rocky passes, along which the road is carried with a skill that does infinite credit to the engineer who formed it. Occasionally the scene is varied by glimpses of the sea, studded, as it there is, with islands. The country continues still of the same aspect; consisting of the most confused and disorderly chaos of broken and rugged rocks, but with rank heather, and warm sheltered corners and nooks, with little clumps of birch trees already in full leaf. Many, too, of the innumerable deep-looking lochs by the roadside have islands covered with birch and rank heather—the haunts of numbers of otters. There seems a great scarcity of birds of all kinds; which is accounted for by the number of marten and wild cats who live here, amongst the great and nearly inaccessible masses of rock, in the most perfectly undisturbed security. Cuckoos, wheatears, and ring-ousels seemed to be almost the only feathered inhabitants, with an occasional pair of ravens or peregrine falcons.

The inn at Scowrie, kept by a man of a most un-Highland name, viz., "Tough," is excellent, and most cleanly and comfortable did we find it, and the people full of civility. Unluckily there were two ship-loads of emigrants on the point of leaving a harbour near Scowrie, and their friends were

wishing them a good voyage in many a bumper of whisky, with the usual accompaniment of bagpipes and reels; so that what with their songs, their music, and the beating of their feet, as they danced under the inspiration both of whisky and pipes, there was a tolerable noise kept up till daylight. But mountain travelling, and a feeling that it was impossible and unjust to be angry with the poor fellows, enabled me soon to sleep as comfortably as if all had been still.

At daylight, according to appointment, I started with Mr. Dunbar in the boat, but drawn by a small Highland pony whose services we had engaged, for the purpose of getting to the nest of the "Eagle Fisher," as the osprey is sometimes called in Gaelic. At the nearest point of the road to the lake we unshipped the boat, and making traces out of rope, we fastened the pony to it, leaving the under carriage and wheels by the roadside; we then managed to get the boat to the water's edge, the pony scrambling, in a manner practised only by mountain-bred ponies, over bog and rock, dragging the boat after him, while we did our utmost to keep it from injury, or from getting stuck in the rough ground.

I was delighted beyond expression at seeing the two ospreys, one of them on the nest and the other soaring above the loch, uttering cries of alarm at our approach.

The nest was placed in a most curious situation. About a hundred and fifty yards from the shore there rose from the deep water a solitary rock about ten feet high, shaped like a broken sugar-loaf, or truncated cone: on the summit of this was the nest—a pile of sticks of very great depth, evidently the accumulation of many breeding seasons, as the osprey returns, year after year, to the same nest. How this heap of sticks withstood the winter gales without being blown at once into the water, puzzled me. In a crevice of the rock was a small tuft or two of green, otherwise it was perfectly bare and steep.

We launched our little bark, and were soon pulling strongly against a head wind across the loch. The female osprey allowed us to approach within two hundred yards or so, and then leaving her nest, sailed upwards with a circling flight, till she joined her mate high above us.

Having reached the rock, and with some difficulty ascended to the nest, our disappointment may be imagined when we found it empty. From the old bird having remained on so long, we had made sure of finding eggs in it. The nest itself,

however, was interesting to me, perched as it was on the very summit of the rock, and composed of large sticks, every one of which must have been a heavy burden for a bird of the size of the osprey. In the centre of the pile of sticks was a cup-shaped hollow, the size of a boy's cap, lined with moss and dead grass, and apparently quite ready to receive eggs. It was of no use lamenting, so we turned our boat towards the landing-place, and drifted back quickly and in silence. Some hooded crows, perceiving that both the ospreys were off their nest, immediately made a dash towards it, and I was much amused at seeing the skirmishing between these mischievous and cunning marauders and the two ospreys; the latter fighting simply *pro aris et focis*, having no eggs or young to defend; while the crows fought lustily in the hope only of finding something in the nest, calculating, probably, as we had done, that the ospreys would not have been sitting on an empty nest.

On returning to the inn at Scowrie, I found that my friend had been more profitably employed in catching a dish of fine-looking though muddy-tasted trout, in a small rushy loch close to the inn.

One of the Duke of Sutherland's foresters brought in a very fine white-tailed eagle, which he had shot the day before: unluckily the plumage was quite destroyed in consequence of the keeper having, to "make sure," discharged his gun at the bird a second time, after it had fallen, in consequence of which the head was nearly blown off. I procured, however, some feathers for the large salmon fly which we fish with in the Spey river, in making which the eagle's feather is the principal material employed.

CHAPTER III.

Inn at Scowrie—Another Osprey's Nest—The Old Ospreys; Eggs of—The River Laxford—Inn of Rhiconnich—Drive to Durness—Beauty of Scenery—Drive Round Loch Erriboll—Glenmore—Loch Maddie—Crows—Grey Geese; Time of Breeding—Old Nest of Osprey—Stag in the Loch—Foxhound—Black-throated Divers—Aultnaharrow—Loch Laighal—Squall of Wind.

WE were loth to leave our comfortable hostel at Scowrie, particularly without visiting the island of Handa, a great breeding-place of sea-fowl; but being rather pressed for time,

we got again under weigh for Durness. Our landlord at Scowrie having told us that he had heard that the osprey was building on an island in a loch about a mile from our road, we left the horse and boat under the charge of a bare-legged and bare-headed boy, at the place he mentioned (a small bridge about three miles from Scowrie), and went to a point of rock, from which we could command a view of the loch in question. We immediately through a glass discovered the nest of the osprey, built in exactly a similar situation to the last; that is, on the summit of a rock about eight feet high, shaped like a truncated cone, and standing exposed and alone in the loch. On coming nearer, we could distinguish the white head of the female osprey on the nest. The male bird was not in view. It was determined that I should remain concealed near the loch, while my two companions went for the boat. This plan was adopted for the double reason that I might be at hand to shoot any hooded crow who might attempt to take the eggs while the osprey was off, she having left the nest on our approach, and also that I might have a chance of shooting the old osprey herself in case she came within shot. I must say that I would rather she had escaped this fate; but as her skin was wanted, I agreed to try to kill her.

For some time after the departure of my companions she flew round and round at a great height, occasionally drifting away with the high wind, and then returning to the loch. She passed two or three times, not very far from me, before I shot at her. But at last I fired, and the poor bird, after wheeling blindly about for a few moments, fell far to leeward of me, and down amongst the most precipitous and rocky part of the mountain, quite dead. She was scarcely down behind the cliffs when I heard the cry of an osprey in quite a different direction, and on looking that way I saw the male bird flying up from a great distance. As he came nearer, I could distinguish plainly with my glass that he was carrying a fish in his claws. On approaching he redoubled his cries, probably expecting the well-known answer, or signal of gratitude, from his mate; but not hearing her, he flew on till he came immediately over the nest. I could plainly see him turning his head to the right and left, as if looking for her, and as if in astonishment at her unwonted absence. He came lower and lower, still holding the fish in his feet, which were stretched out at full length from his body. Not seeing

her, he again ascended and flew to the other end of the lake, the rocks echoing his shrill cry. The poor bird, after making one or two circuits of the lake, then flew away far out of sight, still keeping possession of the fish. He probably went to look for the female at some known and frequented haunt, as he flew rapidly off in a direct line. He soon, however, came over the lake again, and continued his flight to and fro and his loud cries for above an hour, still keeping the fish ready for his mate. I at length heard the voices of my friends, and we soon launched the boat. The osprey became much agitated as we neared the rock where the nest was, and dropped the fish he held into the water. We found two beautiful eggs in the nest, of a roundish shape; the colour white, with numerous spots and marks of a fine rich red brown. As we came away, we still observed the male bird unceasingly calling and seeking for his hen. I was really sorry I had shot her.

This excursion to the lake hindered us so long, that, after resting our horse at Rhiconnich, we did not reach Durness till late at night.

From Scowrie to Durness, particularly about Rhiconnich, the road winds through a constant succession of the most rocky, rugged, and wild glens that it is possible to imagine, with here and there beautiful sheets of water, deep and darkly shaded by the overhanging rocks, and occasionally by small birch woods. Winding round the mouth of the Laxford river, we saw an osprey fishing in, or rather over, the pools near the bay. I am told that the Laxford is one of the best, if not quite the best, sea-trout stream in the North. There are gloriously wild and rocky mountains rising from the landward side of the road, with the most fantastic and picturesque outlines. The bay at Rhiconnich, too, is very beautiful. The whole road, indeed, commands one constant and endless succession of scenery equally magnificent and wild; nor does the traveller drive a mile throughout this journey without some new and most interesting view—varied, too, as it is by rock, water, and mountain, by the rich brown of the heather, the vivid green of the birch woods, and the grassy banks of some of the streams, and also by the deep blue of the lochs. The eye never wearies of being kept constantly occupied in admiring the surrounding objects. I shall not forget, however, one part of our drive between Rhiconnich and Durness, where

the road passes over a wild and dreary hill-side, at a considerable height above the valley below us. Here for some miles we were exposed to the coldest and most driving and wettest mist that ever disgraced a May day. Nothing could be seen twenty yards from the road excepting the drifting clouds. Luckily the wind was behind us, as it would have been almost impossible to have faced it. It cleared off again, however; and before we reached Durness the night was as calm and bright as the morning had been. We did not arrive at Durness till eleven at night, and then we found no one up; indeed we had great difficulty in finding the inn, as there was nothing to distinguish it from any other house in the scattered village, excepting it was considerably larger than its neighbours. After some time, however, we did find one person awake, and got comfortably housed in this very excellent inn.

Nothing can exceed the sea view from Durness, as you look along the varied line of abrupt rocks to the cliff called "Far-out Head," which is very nearly, if not quite, as northerly a point as Cape Wrath.

Having passed the end of Loch Erriboll, and having procured a feed of corn for our horse from Mr. Clark (the tenant of the sheep farm here), we worked a zigzag course up the largest and steepest hill we had to contend with throughout our whole journey. Then descending, we passed the face of a hill, cut and intersected by numberless small streams of the most pure and transparent water that I ever saw, which take their rise from the limestone rocks above.

Loch Erriboll is one the numerous creeks reaching into the mainland from the North Sea, and often serving for a refuge to shipping, which otherwise must inevitably perish in every violent north and north-east wind on this iron-bound coast. On our way from this loch we passed the head of a fine fresh-water lake, Loch Hope, and up a magnificent glen called Glenmore (I believe), the sides of which, woody and precipitous, abound in the wilder *feræ naturæ* of the island. Wild and marten cats live here in peace, and we frequently saw eagles sailing about the higher cliffs, and sometimes perched on some pinnacle of rock. We found out by chance a very perfect echo, repeating every word, and even sentence, with the greatest exactness, and passing from one side of the valley to the other, till the sounds died away in an indistinct murmur.

After emerging from this splendid strath we arrived at the edge of a wide loch with many green islands on it, called Loch Maddie. Here again we put our boat afloat, and leaving our luggage, &c., under charge of Leo, while J—— fished, Mr. Dunbar and I went to search the islands in order to discover what birds were breeding there. We found several hooded crows' nests in the birch-trees on the islands, where they had hitherto lived and plundered in perfect security. However, we destroyed their eggs and young without mercy, and shot the birds themselves whenever and wherever we could.

The hooded crow is the only bird against whom I wage constant and un pitying warfare; I have so constantly detected them destroying my most favourite birds and their eggs, that I have no pity on them. We also found in these islands many nests of the Grey lag goose. To make sure of the species I shot some of the old birds, it having been rather a disputed question amongst several of my friends whether the goose breeding in this country is the Grey lag (*Anser ferus*) or the Bean goose (*Anser segetum*). All the geese on Loch Maddie were the Grey lag; indeed I never saw any of the Bean geese breeding in Sutherland, excepting on the islands of Loch Shin, where a few still breed annually in spite of the constant and cruel warfare waged against them. The number of eggs in each nest was from four to seven, and they had all been apparently sat upon for some time: indeed we found one brood of young birds at least four or five days old. This being on the 18th of May, proved that this bird arrives at its breeding-place very early. A goose sits a month, so that supposing these young birds were four days old, it carries back the time when the old bird commenced sitting to the 14th of April; and then allowing ten days for the bird to prepare her nest and lay her eggs, the Grey lag goose cannot arrive at the breeding-places later than the 1st or 2nd of April. The Bean goose arrives in Morayshire and that part of Scotland from the south as nearly as possible in the third week of March, their arrival a few days earlier or later depending on the state of the weather; and the flocks do not leave that country till the 29th or 30th of April, some few even remaining several days afterwards. This fact shows a great distinction in the habits of the two kinds of geese; for while the Bean goose (*Anser segetum*) is still fattening on the oat and pea fields, the Grey lag goose (*Anser ferus*) has

already laid, and is nearly hatching her eggs, in the wilds of Sutherland. In one island, containing a few stunted birch-trees, we saw an old osprey's nest, not now tenanted; but I am told that the old birds were inhabiting it two years ago. The nest was most interesting: it was placed in a fork of the tree so low that we could see into it without climbing, and it consisted of a perfect cart-load of sticks, varying from the size of a very stout walking-stick down to the twigs of birch and heather of which the inner part of the fabric was composed. I did not measure the nest, but as nearly as I could guess, it was not less than eight feet in length, and nearly four in width; the depth too was very great; the inner lining was composed of a coarse kind of grass that grows in these islands. Although the nest must have weathered many a winter storm of wind, snow, and rain, and was quite bleached, it was still fixed firmly in the fork of the birch-tree. To have seen the ospreys building up this great and strong mass would have repaid one for a journey of many a long mile.

Wilson mentions that in America the osprey builds constantly in trees, but in this country it seldom does so, probably from the want of trees suitable for the purpose. I have been told, however, that a nest is still to be seen on a tree in one of the large pine-woods in Strathspey.

A very curious circumstance happened on the same island, which strongly indicated the habits of red deer during the season when their horns are soft and liable to injury. The island, which is scarcely a rifle-shot in length, and less in breadth, is very rough, and cut up like an old peat moss, but covered with very high heather and coarse grass, in which the wild goose forms her nest. While I was looking about quietly in the broken clefts and ground for these nests, a large stag suddenly rose at my feet out of a deep hollow—that is, deep comparatively speaking, and just sufficiently so for a stag to lie in. The wind was high, and he either had not heard me, or he remained quiet in hopes that I should pass without perceiving him; at any rate he did not move till I nearly stepped upon him. He then rose, and in two springs was in the water and swimming strongly and bravely for the opposite mountain. A stag swims with very great speed and ease: in a short time he reached the shore, which was a good half-mile from the island, and having shaken himself, I saw him through my glass take a long look back,

and then he trotted slowly up the shoulder of the hill. In my numerous deer-stalking excursions I certainly never was so near to an unwounded deer; he had evidently been living in solitary security for some time on the island, and feeding on the coarse grass and plants. He probably had been there ever since he had cast his horns, as the new ones were about five or six inches in length.

While on this island, too, another interesting incident took place. We heard the baying of a hound on the shore. At first I imagined that some fox-hunter's dog had strayed away in pursuit of and was still running a fox or deer; but on looking with my glass, I saw a fine fox-hound sitting on a point of land which reached into the lake, and howling in a manner which plainly showed he had lost his master; and having heard me fire at a crow, he imagined that I was the person he was in search of. After howling for a minute or two, till the hills around echoed with his deep voice, the gallant dog swam into the loch, and made for an island on which I had fired at a grey crow. I saw him land and, with nose to the ground, take up our track; but after a little hesitation he found that the scent was not that of his master, nor of any one he knew, so plunging into the loch again he made for the main land, and having reached it after a stout battle with the waves (the wind then being high), he continued his search round the shore of the lake, taking, however, no further notice of us, although I fired one or two more shots within his hearing. The instinct and reasoning of the dog struck me as very great in his manner of trying if we belonged to the party who had been up to the high ground before daybreak in pursuit of a lamb-killing fox; for we afterwards heard that the fox-hunter of the district had been following his avocation on the heights of Ben Cleebriek that morning, and that some of his dogs had strayed away from him in pursuit, probably, of a deer, though he owned only to their having followed a fox.

As we were rowing back to the point where we launched the boat, we suddenly came upon no less than six of those beautiful birds, the black-throated diver. We pursued them immediately, and drove them up into a small bay of the lake: there after much trouble we managed to shoot one, the rest escaping by diving under the boat or round it, and getting off into the wide part of the loch. None of them attempted to take flight, although so hard pressed and

hemmed up into a corner of the lake. When one was separated from the rest, he generally began to croak in the voice peculiar to these birds. In consequence of their swimming so low in the water and their great strength, it is very difficult to shoot them, particularly as when they are once alarmed they dive so suddenly that they are frequently too quick even for a percussion gun. When alone, this bird takes wing readily enough, and flies off to some neighbouring lake with a quick and lofty flight.

We found our luggage safe under the care of the faithful dog, who had never left his charge, and before dark we arrived at the inn of Aultnaharrow, which is situated near one of the finest lakes in the country, Loch Naver. Like all the inns in Sutherland which are under the efficient and liberal management of the Duke's factors, Aultnaharrow is clean and comfortable.

The following day, leaving my friend to fish in Loch Naver, I drove off in the boat, accompanied by Dunbar and one of Lord Ellesmere's foresters who lives close to the inn, for a loch called Loch Laighal, or, as it is pronounced, Loch Loyal. This is another fine sheet of water several miles in length, with a few islands, the breeding-places of grey geese and numberless gulls. There were vast flocks of that magnificent bird the great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*), and also of the lesser black-backed gull (*Larus fuscus*). The former is a most splendid and beautiful bird, with its pure black and white plumage, and a stretch of wing little less than that of the golden eagle.

We had scarcely launched our boat on the water, leaving the forester on shore, as our tiny craft scarcely held three people comfortably, when a squall of wind came on, blowing down the side of Ben Loyal in a perfect hurricane right from the shore which we had just left. Short as the distance was, we could not row back against it, and had nothing left for it but to go before the wind right across the large loch, fully a mile and a half in width at that part. At the same time, owing to the lowness of the stern, our only chance of safety was to keep the head of the boat to windward, a matter of no small difficulty, as the wind blew in the most violent gusts and increased every moment. The slightest turn of the boat, which would bring her at all broadside to the wind, must have instantly swamped her, and with this pleasant prospect before us we went with fearful speed across the loch.

The only thing I dreaded was, that anything should give way about the oars, or the pins that they worked upon, as nothing could then have saved us. However, *Diis aliter visum*, and we landed safely, but wet enough, on the opposite shore, and right glad we were both when we looked back at the water, which was perfectly white with foam, to feel our feet once more on terra firma. I mention this incident as a warning to any person who may fish or sail on any of these fresh-water lakes surrounded by mountains, to beware of sudden squalls of this kind; for in this instance nothing but a strong arm and good rowing saved us from certain drowning, which would nevertheless have been our fate had the least bolt or fastening given way about the oars, for once broaching to must have swamped us. The wind soon fell, the day became hot, and the beautiful lake with its green banks was again as smooth as glass. Few of the gulls had laid, but we found some more eggs of the Grey lag goose. One nest was in a very peculiar situation for a wild goose, being in the midst of and overhung by a thicket of small birch trees. The otter seems to live in undisturbed security in the islands on all these lakes, as the heather, &c., is full of their roads and marks.

On the stones near the lake I picked up a large adder. As I held her up by her throat it was curious to see the fierce expression of rage the creature put on, and also how long its teeth projected, as if eager to be fastened in my hand, while a drop of bright yellow liquid oozed out at the points of each of its venomous fangs. I knew that this was the poison, but had no idea that these reptiles could produce so large a quantity at once.

Loch Laighal, Loch Maddie, and Loch Naver all abound in the finest trout, and contain also plenty of the *Salmo ferox* or great lake trout, which is caught only by trolling, or by lines baited with small fish. In Loch Naver there are plenty of salmon: I am told that they rise freely and well when the wind is from the south-east, but seldom when it blows from any other quarter.

CHAPTER IV.

Return to Sutherland—Travelling from Edinburgh—Skye Terrier; peculiarities of—Lairg—Loch Shin—River Shin—Reserve of the English—Mr. Young's Experiments respecting Salmon; Anecdotes of Salmon; Manner of Spawning; Food of Salmon—Drive to Aultnaharrow—Curlews, &c.—Loch Naver—Phalaropes—Widgeon—Greenshank, &c.

June 9th.—HAVING been called suddenly to England in the

midst of my rambles in Sutherlandshire in May, I did not find myself again in that country till the 9th of June. Travelling (that is, the mere act of passing along the road) takes up very little of your time nowadays. You go from London to Edinburgh in about thirteen hours, and a good steamer takes the traveller from Granton Pier to Invergordon in Ross-shire quickly and comfortably enough; that is, I left Granton at 6 A.M. on the 6th, and landed at Invergordon early in the evening of the 7th, accompanied only by a Skye terrier, who from his earliest childhood, or rather puppyhood, has always managed to stick closely to me. In wild-fowl shooting, when no dog is required save a quiet retriever, Fred (so was he christened by some of my children) is always allowed to accompany me, as from his quiet discretion he is never in the way. In roe-shooting also he is allowed to remain at my feet while I am waiting in a pass. At the same time, if permitted to hunt, no kind of animal, running or flying, quadruped or biped, comes amiss to him, and he is equally at home in any ground, rock, or loch. There is a kind of quiet, discretionary courage that some of these rough terriers have which is very amusing—nothing seems to put them out, and Fred is as much at home in a crowded railway station or London street as he is in a furze-cover. He rather annoys me sometimes when travelling, for as soon as he has seen me safely housed in an hotel, he is very apt to wander off in search of adventures and acquaintances of his own through the town, wherever it is; and although it may be a new place to him, he invariably finds his way back to my room for the time being, regardless of all obstacles in the form of waiters, chambermaids, &c. I used to be afraid of losing him, but after some experience of his ways, I find that I may safely leave him to his own devices; for having once or twice despatched ostlers and boys in all directions to search for him, I perceived that he always came back alone, looking rather ashamed of himself, and not venturing to make himself very prominent in the room till he had examined the expression of my face from under a chair or sofa, for dogs are great physiognomists. Then, on seeing that I am generally too pleased at his return to be angry at his absence, he comes out of his place of refuge wriggling his long rough body about in all sorts of coaxing but uncouth attitudes, and at last putting his honest rough face in my hand or on my knee, he finds that peace is declared, and he

waits patiently till I take hat in hand again; for once having explored the streets, he seems to take no further interest in the place.

There is no end or limit to the quaint conceits of some terriers of this kind, when they live in constant intercourse with their masters. Fred's great attachment to my children, too, makes him a universal favourite in the house, and he walks about with them amongst their pet animals, apparently taking as much interest in them as the children do themselves. I must say, however, that he requires a formal introduction to any new living acquisition of this kind; but once introduced to them, they are safe from his strong white teeth for ever.

These terriers are excellent swimmers, and are apparently as much at their ease in the water as on land. Fred is as web-footed as an otter. Some dogs dislike accompanying one to the river side only to look on. Indeed, one retriever which I had become so bored and *ennuyé* with this work, that at last I had only to show him my fishing rod to induce him immediately to retire to some hiding-place rather than be asked to accompany me. Another retriever, on the contrary, always took the most lively interest in my fishing, watching the fly and getting into a state of great excitement whenever I hooked a fish: indeed, if allowed to do so, he would go in and land the fish, taking it carefully and delicately by the back in his teeth; but as he often got entangled in the line and did mischief, I was obliged to stop this. A great treat, however, to this dog was to put some living sea trout into any shallow pool where he could catch them and bring them one by one to whoever carried the fishing-basket.

I have no doubt that many wild animals, such as the fox, wild cat, polecat, &c., catch numbers of fish during their nocturnal wanderings. Their tracks about the water's edge have frequently convinced me of this: the fish, too, being apt to take to the shallows at night, are easier caught than in the daytime.

To return, however, to Sutherlandshire. On the 7th of June I arrived at the good town of Tain, and on the 9th was at Lairg Inn. An excellent place of rest, too, is the inn at Lairg, and the situation beautiful beyond description—at any rate it is so on a fine day; but situated as it is at the end of Loch Shin, a Highland lake about eighteen miles in length,

the prospect from the inn windows must be very different on a wild autumn day, with wind and sleet driving up from the west, from what it was on the fine June evening on which I arrived. The view combines the most happy mixture of mountain, water, and green herbage, dotted with fine old birch trees : a few picturesque buildings, too, which are seen from the inn, add to the happy and *riant* expression of the scene.

The Shin river, which runs out of the lake near the inn, is a fine and picturesque stream, charming to the eye of both painter and fisherman. The Shin salmon are of a large size and very plentiful. I stopped for half an hour or so at the falls, two or three miles from the lake, and saw a great number of salmon, and even trout, leaping ; some of them succeeded in passing up, others fell back into the pool below, in consequence of not having leaped with sufficient strength, or from having miscalculated the distance and angle at which to take the leap. All the scenery about the falls of the Shin is very beautiful : the steep and lofty hill which comes down to the water's edge is covered with wood, and, at this time of the year, was alive with singing birds of all kinds ; whilst the coo of the wood-pigeon, and the shrill cry of the kestrel as she hovered with quivering wings over our heads, combined to please the eye and ear.

We were rather amused with the truly English determination which was shown by a gentleman (who, like ourselves, was admiring the falls) *not* to enter into conversation, or indeed to admit that he was aware of our presence. Perched on the extreme point of rock overlooking the falls, for above half an hour he turned his back most resolutely towards us, as we sat immediately behind him.

It is part of the nature of Englishmen to look upon all strangers as intruders, if not as enemies ; and yet many a pleasant acquaintance and friendship have I formed without any formal introduction, being, I am happy to say, un-English enough not to be afraid of committing myself or of losing caste by addressing a stranger. Throughout life I always find that civility is met by civility, wherever it may be bestowed. At the same time nothing is easier than to put a stop to impertinence, should one meet with it.

En route to Lairg I called on Mr. Young, who is manager of the Duke of Sutherland's fisheries in the county. He received me with great civility, and kindly gave me much

curious and interesting information respecting the habits of salmon and trout, having studied their natural history, and having lived, as it were, amongst fish during his whole life. Mr. Young has made such good use of the opportunities which his position has afforded him, that he has thrown considerable light on the history of the inhabitants of an element in which we cannot follow them. His patience in trying experiments with the spawn and young of the salmon has enabled him to explain many parts of their history which had hitherto been obscure, or at best but imperfectly understood. The encouragement, too, which he has always met with from the Duke, has still further enabled him to bring a naturally acute and inquiring mind to bear on the point in question. For some years he managed (by forming artificial spawning-beds or ponds) to have the ova under his immediate observation from the hour of their being deposited to the time that in the shape of "smolts" (I think that is the local name) of four to six inches in length, the young salmon go down to their mysterious feeding nurseries in the depths of the ocean. Mr. Young kindly showed me numerous specimens preserved in spirits of wine of the gradual development and growth of the fish, from its egg state, when it looks like a small pea, to its full maturity.

Strange as it seems, it would certainly appear from his observations that a salmon may be kept for any length of time in a river without growing beyond the weight of two to four ounces, and he showed me specimens of salmon which, though of perfect form and condition, did not exceed that size; whereas had they been allowed to reach the sea, they would at the same age have weighed from six to ten pounds each. The growth of salmon when in the sea is wonderful, it having been indisputably proved that a salmon has grown eleven pounds six ounces during the short period of five weeks and two days: the fish having been marked on its passage to the sea, was caught again in the same river when ascending, after an interval of that duration.

The destruction of salmon during their passage to, and residence in, the sea must be wonderful, and defies all calculation. Did all the fish, which descend as fry, return as salmon, the rivers would not hold them. Their enemies are countless; every fish and every sea-fowl preys and fattens on them. At the mouths of rivers, and indeed at every shallow on their passage, thousands of gulls and other birds

prey upon the fry, while trout and eels are feeding on them under water. As soon as they reach the sea too, fish of all kinds are ready to devour them.

Mr. Young told me also that his young family of salmon fry which he hatched and kept confined in ponds connected with the river always became perfectly tame, and the moment that he steps on the plank laid across the ponds for the purpose of feeding the fish from, they all flock round him ready to dart at the food he puts in. In some of the ponds he had put a number of small eels, which soon grew in size, and became as tame and familiar as the young salmon. As the cold weather came on, the eels all disappeared, and he supposed that they had managed to escape, led by their instinct to take refuge in some deeper pools. However, one fine spring day, when he had long ceased to think of his slimy pets, he happened to pass over one of the planks, when he was delighted to see them all issue out from under the stones asking for food, as if a day only, instead of many weeks, had passed since he last had fed them. Does not this most clearly prove that eels lie dormant during cold weather?

I asked Mr. Young if he could explain why at the mouths of rivers, when angling, one always catches such a variety of trout—a variety which does not exist at some distance from the sea, each and every stream having its own peculiar species. His opinion, founded on practical experiment and long experience, coincided much with mine, founded on mere casual and unscientific observation, namely, that the sea trout and river trout sometimes breed with each other, thus forming a great variety of shade and colour. He also states that the female salmon will breed with a male trout, which he says has been clearly proved by close observation, in the following manner:—A pair of salmon, male and female, being seen forming their spawning-bed together, the male salmon was killed with a spear and taken out of the water. The female immediately dropped down the stream to the next pool, and after a certain interval returned with another male. He having shared the same fate as his predecessor, the female again went down to the pool, and brought up another male. The same process was gone on with of spearing the male, till the widowed fish, finding no more of her own kind remaining in the pool, returned at last accompanied by a large river trout, who assisted her in forming

the spawning-bed, &c., with the same assiduity that he would have used had she been a trout instead of a salmon; the female appearing to be determined that her ova should not be left in the gravel without being fertilized by the male, thus taking the trout as a *pis aller*, and carrying out the proverb—"si on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer ce qu'on a."

The process of preparing the spawning-beds is curious. The two fish come up together to a convenient place, shallow and gravelly. Here they commence digging a trench across the stream, sometimes making it several inches deep. In this the female deposits her eggs, or ova; and she having left the bed, the male takes her place, and deposits *his* spawn on the ova of the female. The difference may be perhaps easily exemplified by the *soft* and *hard* roe of a herring; the former being that of the male, and without this the hard roe or ova of the female fish would be barren. When the male has performed his share of the work, they both make a fresh trench immediately above the former one, thus covering up the spawn in the first trench with the gravel taken out of the second: the same process is repeated till the whole of their spawn is deposited, when the fish gradually work their way down to the salt water to recruit their lost strength and energy.

The spawn is thus left to be hatched in due time, but is sometimes destroyed by floods, which bury it too deep, or sweep it entirely away; at other times it is destroyed by want of water, a dry season reducing the river to so small a size as to leave the beds exposed to the air. The time required to hatch the eggs depends much on the state of the weather: in warm seasons they are hatched much quicker than in cold. The details I have here given are very imperfect; but perhaps they may induce those interested in the subject to read a little work published by Mr. Young, the result of his observations and experience for many years.

It is a common opinion that no food is ever found in the stomach of a salmon; but this is quite erroneous. On first entering the rivers they are often perfectly gorged with small eels; fry, and even good-sized herring are constantly found in them; showing that the salmon is as voracious a fish as his cousin the trout. When in fresh water they do not seem to have the same voracity. That they do feed on small fish, &c., however, in lake and river cannot be doubted, as we

know that trolling with parr is as efficient a way of killing salmon in several waters as fly-fishing, though not so generally practised: nay, many a salmon dies an ignoble death from taking a worm.

This year I was fishing on a river in the North of Scotland, near a town where there was plenty of anglers, young and old, good and bad. There was one old piscator, who was most assiduous in his attention to the river, and whom I have seen for hours together at one small pool; changing his bait from fly to worm and from worm to fly, as he fancied the inclinations of the fish might be turned at the moment. One day we saw him in his usual position at the head of a rocky pool, and found that he had risen a salmon. After tempting the fish with every fly contained in an old bible, which served as a fishing-book, without success, he told us, as we greeted him in passing, that he *would* have the fish before dark: and sure enough, late in the evening, while taking a stroll up the river, we met the old gentleman coming home, and after a little coquetry on the subject, he produced *the* salmon, wrapped up in a stuffy pocket handkerchief, and crammed into his trousers, where he carried it in order to avoid notoriety on the subject. Not having permission, I fancy, to kill salmon in the river, he had killed the fish with a worm late in the evening, after everything else had failed.

The first few miles of the drive from Lairg to Aultnaharrow we skirt the edge of Loch Shin, passing through a beautiful wood of birch, at this season (June) full of singing-birds, wood-pigeons, &c. Beyond this we pass for many miles through a desolate and dreary-looking range of hill ground—the more desolate-looking too from the ground being covered with a kind of coarse grass, instead of the rich brown red of the heather. The number of curlews and golden plovers is very great all along this grassy tract of country. The plovers are very tame, running along the road in front of the horse, and at last only flying a few yards to some higher hillock or stone, where they stop watching us till we pass. These birds have their nests rather high up on the hills: their eggs are peculiarly large and beautifully marked, the prevailing colour being a brown, shaded and spotted with darker markings of a brownish-green colour. It is very difficult, however, to describe the eggs of many of these birds, no two of them being exactly alike. The curlews are far more shy

and wary, and as long as we are within sight they keep up a loud unceasing cry of alarm, wheeling round and round, but generally at a tolerably respectful distance. I saw some young curlews on the ground, and got out to examine them; they are curious, long-legged, top-heavy little fellows, and when pursued seemed to trip themselves up in their hurry, and to tumble head foremost into every hole in their way. The bill of the young bird is as short as that of a golden plover. When I held it in my hand to examine the curious plumage, or rather down which covered it, the little bird looked up at me with its great dark prominent eye with such an expression of confidence and curiosity, that had I been the most determined collector of specimens of birds, I could not have refrained from putting him carefully down on the ground again: when I did so he ran up to the top of a little grassy hillock, and looked round for his screaming parents, who, at a safe distance, were wheeling with a most wonderful outcry round the head of my terrier.

One cannot understand why a curlew's bill should be curved in the curious manner in which it is. The end of the bill is, like that of a woodcock, furnished with a set of delicate nerves to enable it to feel its food under ground. In those parts of the country where curlews are numerous, the moist turnip fields are generally bored all over by them. I tried for trout in Loch Naver (close to the inn at Aultnaharrow), and caught some fine and excellent fish for our supper.

In the swampy ground near the west end of the lake a vast number of birds seem to breed. Snipes, curlews, redshanks, plovers, &c., &c., all keep up a constant cry of alarm on any intrusion into their dominion. While I was fishing, Mr. Dunbar called my attention to two beautiful little birds near the edge of the water, which he pronounced to be the red-necked phalarope. Not having any specimens in his collection, he went to the inn for a gun, while I sat down to watch them. The red-necked phalarope is certainly the most beautiful little wader of my acquaintance. There were a pair of them, male and female, feeding near the loch, in a little pool which was covered with weeds of different kinds. Nothing could be more graceful than the movements of these two little birds as they swam about in search of insects, &c. Sometimes they ran lightly on the broad leaves of the water-lily, which served them for a raft and entirely kept them out

of the water. Though not exactly web-footed, the phalarope swims with the greatest ease. The attachment of these two birds to each other seemed very great: wherever in their search for food they wandered so far apart as to be hidden by the intervening weeds, the male bird stopped feeding suddenly, and, looking round, uttered a low and musical call of inquiry, which was immediately answered by the female in a different note, but perfectly expressive of her answer, which one might suppose to be to the purport that she was at hand and quite safe: on hearing her the male immediately recommenced feeding, but at the same time making his way towards her; she also flew to meet him: they then joined company for a moment or two, and after a few little notes of endearment, turned off again in different directions. This scene was repeated a dozen times while I was watching them. They seemed to have not the slightest fear of me, for frequently they came within a yard of where I was sitting, and, after looking up, they continued catching the small water-insects, &c., on the weeds without minding my presence in the least.

After having apparently exhausted the food in one pool, on a signal from the male they suddenly both took wing, and flew away to a fresh feeding-place two or three hundred yards off, where we afterwards found them. Though we could not discover their nest, I have no doubt that they had eggs very near the spot where we saw them. Indeed, on dissecting the female we found two eggs in her, nearly full-sized, so that probably she had already deposited the other two, which would have made her number complete. I find no account of this bird breeding on the mainland of Scotland.

A great many widgeon breed about Loch Naver. I saw several drakes sitting on the points of grass running out into the lake, shining brightly in their beautiful and variegated summer dress. I also came upon an old duck-widgeon, who kept fluttering round my feet. On looking closely I found about seven young widgeon two or three days old, very like wild ducks of the same age, but having, instead of the green colour of the young mallard, a kind of reddish brown tinge over the whole of their down. They soon scuttled away into the lake, and we presently saw them swimming far out with the old bird. The number of young redshanks, peewits, &c., seemed very great. The terrier found them everywhere. The redshank has a merry and not unmusical note as he flies

round and round with great rapidity on his nest being approached. I saw no greenshanks about Loch Naver, but plenty of them about the smaller and more lonely rushy lakes on the hills. The note of the greenshank is musical, and not quite so shrill as that of the redshank. Its flight, too, is different, making longer strokes with the wing; it darts with sudden jerks through the air, somewhat in the manner of a dragon-fly; sometimes hovering, and then darting downwards with great quickness. The nest of the greenshank is particularly difficult to find. I never found one myself, and have only once heard of its having been discovered. There is a peculiarity about the egg which, though difficult to describe, immediately strikes the observer, if he is at all learned in birds' eggs. The prevailing colour is olive-green. The shell seems of a fine texture, and the spots are small, but numerous.

A forester brought me four eggs, which he said were those of the jack snipe. Though I have every reason for thinking that he would not wilfully have deceived me, I suspect that he was mistaken in the bird, and that the action of the hen snipe when disturbed from her nest, being unlike her usual flight, made him believe her to be the jack snipe instead of the common one. The eggs were certainly small for a snipe, but not smaller than I have sometimes seen them. I have never read any account of the jack snipe breeding in Scotland that I considered well authenticated. There is every probability that a few birds, unequal to the long flight of their migration, may remain in this country during the summer. But notwithstanding the eager search made for the nest by egg collectors, it has never yet been found in Scotland. I heard that the jack snipe had been seen breeding near Tongue, but the gamekeeper there says that this is not the case, and that probably the dunlin was mistaken for that bird.

CHAPTER V.

Length of Day—Sedge Warbler—Different Birds near Loch Naver—Ben Cleebriek—Rain—Loch Maddie—Frost—Ben Laighal—Foxes—Sheep Killing—Catching Wild Ducks—Peregrine Falcon; Manner of Catching their Young—Golden Eagles—Tongue—Fine Scenery of Bay of Tongue and Islands—Wild Cat—Seals.

THE nights at this season are most enjoyable; in fact, there is no darkness. I went out of the inn at midnight, and was

much amused at hearing the different cries of the birds. Close to the door is a small enclosed clump of larch, where the grass and weeds are very high and rank. In this little patch it seems that a sedge warbler had made her nest. All day long had the male bird been singing to his mate, and now at midnight he was still uttering unceasingly his merry note : I never met with so indefatigable a songster ; night or day he seemed never to weary.

Towards the loch a constant tumult was kept up amongst the waders and waterfowl. High in the air was heard the common snipe, earning his Gaelic name of "air goat" by his incessant bleating cry ; while redshanks, curlews, golden plovers, and peewits, all seemed to be as lively as if it had been noon instead of midnight ; occasionally, too, both widgeon and teal were heard to whistle each after its own peculiar fashion ; and the quack of the common mallard was also constant. Now and then a note expressive of alarm was uttered by some bird, and immediately a dead silence was kept by the whole community for a few moments ; but this was soon succeeded by a greater noise than ever, particularly amongst the peewits, which seemed by their cries to be darting about the head of some intruder or enemy. Probably on these occasions a fox, wild cat, or owl had made his appearance amongst them in search of tender food for his own young ravening brood.

Though I had to rise very early, I betook myself to bed with great regret, and left the window open, in order to hear the serenade of the sedge warbler to the last moment of being awake.

Ben Cleebriek, the highest hill (or nearly so) in Sutherland, is immediately in front of the inn ; and the forester, after looking at me from head to foot, pronounced his dictum that he thought I should get to the top in two hours or so ; at any rate, that he could do it in that time. Notwithstanding the threatening look of the mist on its summit, I started, hoping to see some ptarmigan nests amongst the loose stones near the top. Dunbar warned me that we should not succeed in reaching the summit, owing to the state of the weather ; and he was correct ; for, although there was an occasional clearing away of the clouds, when we were about half-way up there commenced such a determined and heavy torrent of rain, that we had to give in ; the whole mountain, too, was enveloped in a cloud like a wet blanket,

impenetrable to the sight. For a long time we sat down under my plaid, which kept us tolerably dry (Dunbar, myself, and the dog); with nothing else to enliven us except watching the curious antics of two ravens on a great lump of rock in front of us. At last, in despair, we made our way home, as quickly as we could, splashing through the rain-water which had converted the whole hill-side into pools. Near the loch-side, amongst the birch trees, I saw a great many red-polls and other small birds.

From Aultnaharrow we drove again to Loch Maddie, where I caught some fine trout. We saw a few Grey lag geese, and found the grey crows again tenanting the nests which we had attacked three or four weeks ago. Of course I smashed every egg and killed every crow that came within my reach.

On the 10th of June the frost was so severe in Strath Naver, that it cut down all the potatoes to the ground, and even the ferns and some other wild plants near the waterside were entirely blackened. A hard white frost at this season is always supposed to be followed by heavy rain, and the saying was this time quite correct.

On our road to Tongue the following day I stopped for an hour or two about Loch Laighal, one of the most beautiful of the lakes in Sutherland. Ben Laighal is a fine and picturesque mountain, and of great extent. We learned at a shepherd's house that the fox-hunter of that district had been up on the mountain since three o'clock in pursuit of some foxes who had established themselves in the rocky corries near the summit, and had commenced killing the old sheep. It is not the general custom of foxes to destroy the old and full-grown sheep where lambs are plentiful; but a colony or pair of foxes having once commenced this habit, the mischief and havoc which they commit are beyond calculation, more particularly as they seldom tear or eat much of so large an animal, but feed on the blood. According to the accounts of the shepherds the foxes of Ben Laighal are very prone to this kind of prey, and kill the old sheep in preference to lambs or game.

The foxes in the Highland districts must frequently be put to many shifts for their living, and no doubt become proportionally cunning. To keep himself in the fine and sleek condition in which a fox always is, many a trick and *ruse de guerre* of surpassing cleverness must be practised. The stories of their manœuvres to catch animals are endless;

and, though many of them would be amusing enough, I do not like quoting as facts incidents of this kind, the authenticity of which I cannot vouch for, however much I may believe them to be true, and I must confess to being very credulous on this point. I have been assured by a person not given at all to exaggerate nor easily deceived, that he once witnessed the following trick. Very early one morning he saw a fox eyeing most wistfully a number of wild ducks feeding in the rushy end of a Highland lake. After due consideration, the fox, going to windward of the ducks, put afloat in the loch several bunches of dead rushes or grass, which floated down amongst the ducks without causing the least alarm. After watching the effects of his preliminary fleet for a short time, the fox, taking a good-sized mouthful of grass in his jaws, launched himself into the water as quietly as possible, having nothing but the tips of his ears and nose above water. In this way he drifted down amongst the ducks, and made booty of a fine mallard. Though this story seems extraordinary, it must be remembered that the fox manages to capture wild ducks, wood-pigeons, hares, and numberless other animals, sufficient too keep himself and family; and it is self-evident that in doing so he must practise many a trick and manœuvre that would seem most improbable if related, and quite beyond the instinct of animals. I have seen one in confinement lay out part of his food just within reach of his chain, in order to attract the tame ducks and chickens about the yard, and then, having concealed himself in his kennel, wait in an attitude ready to spring out till some duck or fowl came to his bait, which he immediately pounced upon. Those, too, who have trapped foxes can tell of the extreme cunning and sagacity displayed by them in avoiding danger. In fact, altogether a fox in a state of nature is as interesting an animal as he is beautiful, and nothing can exceed the grace and agility of his movements when he is hunting, or playing unobserved, as he fancies, by his enemy man. It has happened to me frequently to have opportunities of watching a fox, and I have always been unwilling to put a stop to my amusement by shooting him, which, in a country where hounds cannot be kept, one feels bound to do, as a punishment for the endless mischief which he commits.

On the east or north-east side of Loch Laighal there is a very beautiful hill covered with wood to a considerable

height, and surmounted by a curiously-formed steep cliff—the very place for an eagle's nest: I was told that a nest had been destroyed there last year.

The whole view of Ben Laighal is magnificent, and, in driving round it, we had the advantage of seeing it on every side. Towards the loch the mountain slopes down, covered with bright green herbage; but to the north and west nothing can surpass the savage grandeur of its rocky precipices. Viewed from Tongue, Ben Laighal is, I think, the most magnificent looking mountain in Sutherlandshire. Our attention was attracted by the cries of the peregrine falcon, and we saw the two birds flying about a high rock. Having hailed a shepherd's boy, we learned where the nest was, and under his guidance climbed up the mountain—and a good steep climb it was—till we got within a few yards of the nest; so near, indeed, did we reach, that with two joints of my fishing-rod I could just touch the young birds, who were sitting eyeing us boldly and fearlessly on a ledge of rock where the nest was placed. When, however, we attempted to push them out of the nest, they retired farther in, where they were in tolerable security. All the time we were there the old birds flew screaming over our heads. I did not think of a plan that is adopted sometimes to capture young peregrine falcons when the nest cannot be reached without danger. It is very simple, and succeeds with all the courageous kinds of hawks. A person having reached the top of the rock immediately above the nest, ties a rough blue bonnet, or some similar substance, to a bundle of heather the size of a man's head; then dropping this attached to a rope upon the nest, the young falcons, instead of being frightened, immediately attack it, and, sticking their talons into the cap, hold on courageously and determinedly till they are dragged up to the top of the cliff. Even then it is sometimes necessary to cut the cap to pieces before they will relinquish their hold. In this way the young birds are captured, without risk to the capturer or injury to themselves. Indeed, on the present occasion I was not very anxious to get them, as they would probably only have been destroyed in travelling.

Between Loch Laighal and Tongue, on driving round the corner of a rock, we suddenly came upon two golden eagles who were hunting close to the road. They were nearly within shot of us; so, leaving the horse and carriage to take

care of themselves, we jumped out, gun in hand, to try to get shots at them. Two or three times the birds swooped down, and one of them carried off some bird, probably a grouse, taking it far away round the cliffs of Ben Laighal. The other eagle then made a sudden swoop down to the ground, within a hundred yards of us, but just behind a small hillock; we ran to the place, confident of getting the bird, but arrived just in time to see the eagle carrying off its prey, whatever it was, in the same direction as that taken by its mate, in all probability straight to the nest.

Reaching the brow of a hill, we came in full view of the fine plantations and bay of Tongue. Beautiful and refreshing to the eye were the woods and cultivated fields of Tongue, bursting into view suddenly as they did, after some days' travelling through the rugged wilds of the interior of Sutherland. The beautiful bay was as smooth as glass, the timber growing to the water's edge; and the whole scene was made still more striking by the abrupt and precipitous outline of the headlands both of the main land and the islands at the mouth of the Kyle. It is worth a journey of many miles to see the Kyle of Tongue alone.

Tongue House, formerly the residence of Lord Reay, the then proprietor of a magnificent range of mountain property, is one of the most beautiful places of the sort that I ever saw. The house itself is irregular, but picturesque; and the gardens, overlooking the sea, are warm, sheltered, and most enjoyable in every respect. The fruit, flowers, and vegetables were growing with as much luxuriance, and were nearly as forward as I should have expected to have seen had they been situated in the southern instead of the northern extremity of the island; while the fine avenues and groves of elm and other trees would do credit to any place in England. All this, combined with the wild outline of rocks and cliffs which nearly surround the bay, and the magnificent precipices of Ben Laighal—all this combined, I say, formed a coup d'œil which, though it may be equalled, can scarcely be surpassed in any country. I understood from Mr. Horsburgh, the Duke of Sutherland's factor in this district, that his Grace contemplates making a harbour within the Kyle of Tongue.

The keeper pointed out to me from near the inn the sites of two eagles' nests in the rocks of Ben Laighal, and a more appropriate or fitting locale for eyries I never saw.

At the entrance to the bay are some islands—one named Roan Island, or the Seal Island; and the others are called the Rabbit Islands, from being tenanted by numbers of these animals. The rabbits, however, must there be of little use, excepting as food to birds of prey. In the winter the eagles and hawks feed greatly upon them. The eider-ducks also breed on these islands; and are so tame when nesting that they allow themselves to be lifted off their nest, and the down of which it is formed to be taken away, without deserting it. I saw a few eider-ducks swimming about in the bay, amongst numerous cormorants and other birds. The rocks along the coast are inhabited by a great number of wild cats, otters, &c., who live here in tolerable peace, as the game is not much looked after excepting in particular localities. Indeed, the ground near the coast here is not well adapted for grouse. The keeper showed me at his house an immense cat, which he said was bred between a tame and a wild cat; and though such an occurrence is very rare, I am sure that he was correct in this instance. The animal showed certain peculiarities of his wild father's race, in the size and shape of his head, the shortness and roughness of his tail; and in other points had a likeness to the wild cat, which, though difficult to explain, was unmistakeable. I have seen this resemblance to both parents in mules of different kinds, such as a mule between blackcock and pheasant, or pheasant and common fowl, in all which birds something catches an accustomed eye which immediately points out what the parents were. The cat, too, belonging to Ross, the keeper at Tongue, had a peculiar wildness and antipathy to strangers, not suffering himself to be caressed, or indeed scarcely to be looked at, by any one excepting the keeper's wife, for whom the animal showed great attachment. When I entered the house he bolted out, and it was with difficulty that Mrs. Ross caught him; and when she brought him in again in her arms, the animal showed the greatest fear of and animosity to me, and was constantly endeavouring to escape.

It was delightful to hear in the plantations at Tongue the coo of the wood-pigeon and the songs of thrush, siskin, &c. The trees seemed to be full of birds, most of which, to reach these woods, must have wandered over many miles of ground very uncongenial to their habits and tastes. Indeed it is difficult to understand how many of the birds, such as the golden-crested wren, the little blue titmouse, &c., could

ever have found their way here. The landrails too seemed to be numberless; in every patch of corn they were calling and answering each other in such quantities, that it was impossible to tell how many were croaking at once. I also heard two or three goatsuckers (*Caprimulgus*) making their whirring noise about the stone walls and belts of plantations. All night the sedge-warbler was cheering his mate with his sweet and constant song.

I saw some seals playing the most extraordinary gambols in the smooth water. The sea was as calm as possible, and like a mirror everywhere, excepting where these animals were swimming after each other in a circle, so rapidly that their track resembled a complete whirlpool. Occasionally they lifted themselves perpendicularly up in the water, showing half their bodies, and looking as like the representation of a mermaid as possible.

I should have liked to prolong my stay had it been in my power to do so, as there is much to interest the visitor, both in the varied and magnificent scenery of land and water, and also in the numerous wild animals, common enough here, but rare in the more southern parts of the country.

CHAPTER VI.

Ferry from Tongue—Difficulties of our Start—Seals—Shepherds, &c.—Emigration—Hellam Inn—Storm—River Hope—Drive to Durness—Cave—Rock Pigeons—Inn at Rhieconnich—Search for Osprey's Nest—Swimming to Nest—Loch of the Eagle Fisher—Stalking the Osprey—Row up the Bay—Loss of Fishing Line—Scowrie—Island of Handa—Innumerable Birds, &c.

OUR start from Tongue for Durness was amusing, though not without difficulty. We had to cross a ferry immediately below the inn; but on going to the ferry-house and raising the flag that signified the want of a large ferry-boat (the boats being on the opposite side of the bay), we after some delay were answered by the arrival of a small sailing-boat, far too narrow to take over either horse or carriage. On making inquiry of the ferryman, he told us that *the* large boat was at present out of the water and under repair, but that if we could wait ten days or a fortnight it might be ready. This did not sound promising; but I settled the difficulty by sending the horse to a point, from which a boy

was to bring him across a part of the sands fordable at low water. We then took the boat off the wheels, which we managed to stow away in the small ferry-boat, and taking our own boat in tow, we sailed across with a good breeze, which carried us well over the bay. In one part the current of the ebbing tide is very strong.

While waiting for the horse's arrival, I amused myself by watching through my glass the singular and awkward-looking antics and gambols of a large herd of seals, who were playing and resting upon a sand-bank in the middle of the bay. It is curious to see with what activity these unwieldy-looking fellows move themselves about on the sand, ill adapted as they appear for locomotion on the land. The cry of the seal is wild and mournful, difficult to describe, but something between the mew of a cat and the howl of a dog; a most unpleasant sound it is, though it sometimes harmonizes sufficiently well with the wild scenery surrounding them.

Some thirty miles out at sea opposite this part of the coast is an island, or range of rocks. Exposed to all the violence of the breakers of the Northern Sea, it is difficult to land on; but once or twice a year a crew of fishermen go off to it in a strong boat, and usually manage to get about a hundred seals, the oil and skins of which repay them well for their labour.

Blue rock pigeons live in all the caves on this coast, and are to be seen flitting to and fro from morning to night.

For some distance after crossing the Tongue ferry the road is dreary and bleak, passing over a brown and wet tract of mossy ground, and for several miles we continued ascending. The wind and rain were incessant and very heavy. Having surmounted the highest ridge, we descended the hill to the Hope River, which is crossed by what is called a chain-boat; that is, we drive upon a wooden platform without taking the horse out of the carriage. The platform then, with all upon it, is hauled across the river by means of a chain and windless. The glen through which the river Hope runs is very beautifully shut in by its wooded banks; and the grey mountains offering a new point of interest at every turn of the road, give never-ceasing pleasures and excitement. Here we continually saw eagles and other rare birds. A shepherd told us that the lambs were killed every day by eagles; but he seemed to know little, and to care less, about the breeding-place of the birds. It is nearly impossible to get a direct or truthlike answer from many of the High-

landers; for though intelligent enough, they seem to have a kind of suspicious dislike to giving information.

One thing particularly struck me in this part of the country. Depending on the Duke of Sutherland's well-known kindness and liberality, the lower class of inhabitants take but little trouble towards earning their own livelihood. At whatever hour of the day you go into a cottage, you find the whole family idling at home over the peat-fire. The husband appears never to employ himself in any way beyond smoking, taking snuff, or chewing tobacco; the women doing the same, or at the utmost watching the boiling of a pot of potatoes; while the children are nine times out of ten crawling listlessly about or playing with the ashes of the fire.

The Duke, having tried every plan that philanthropy and reason could suggest, has now succeeded in opening their eyes to the advantage of emigrating, and at a great expense sends numbers yearly to Canada, where these very people, who at home, in spite of every effort and encouragement, drag on a life useless to themselves and burthensome to others, when once settled in their new country, put their shoulder to the wheel, and rapidly became most independent and comfortable; and instead of seeing their children grow up in the midst of self-imposed squalid misery, they see them become daily more prosperous and thriving. Certainly, in this rocky and sterile part of the country, it *is* difficult for a cottager to advance himself. The soil is not adapted for a numerous population; there is nothing to feed mankind on: all or the greatest part of the necessary grain must be imported from the lowland; and the lowland farmers, finding a better price and better customers elsewhere, naturally send their produce to the best market. This mountainous country is only fit for sheep, and sheep-farming is by far the best use to put it to. The bays are certainly full of fish; but it seems nearly impossible to make good fisherman of hill-men, often as it has been tried. The north-west Highlanders, having found out from their friends the great advantages derived from emigration, are now anxious to take advantage of the Duke's liberal system of sending them out.

To continue our journey. We were obliged at last to make for a small inn called Heilam, on the shore of Loch Erriboll; and glad enough were we to get there, for it blew a perfect gale, and the rain was unceasing. Though the outside of the

house looked unpromising, we found the interior clean enough, the people respectable, and plenty of fresh herrings and new-laid eggs. So, the storm not abating, we determined to take up our quarters there for the night.

Loch Erriboll is an excellent harbour of refuge during gales from the north and north-east. The anchorage is good, and the water deep; so that no storm comes on from that quarter without some vessels coming in for shelter. I went out to the leeward of the rocks of the peninsula on which the inn is built, and, accompanied by Fred, sat some time watching several vessels come in, driving like leaves before the storm; and it was a relief to my mind as each vessel in her turn swung round to her anchor, having weathered the head of the peninsula and entered the sheltered bay formed by the land on which the inn stands, where they rode in perfect safety in tolerably smooth water. Notwithstanding a stream which I found in the morning running through my bed-room, I slept soundly enough. The wind and rain had somewhat abated, and I walked across the country towards a fine headland, some six or eight miles off, called Whitenhead. The rain coming on again obliged me to return without quite reaching it. The entire coast here is very grand and steep, exposed to the whole force of the ocean: the rocks are cut up and weather-beaten to a degree unknown in more southern or more sheltered countries.

In the course of my walk I came to the mouth of the River Hope, which runs into the sea half-way between Heilam and Whitenhead. The course of the river is very picturesque, forming as it does a green glen covered with grass and foliage in the midst of the dreary grey country which surrounds it. I am told that a great number of salmon ascend into Loch Hope when the river is tolerably high. In a corner sheltered by rocks and birch-covered banks is a solitary hut, where Mr. Hogarth's fishermen live during the fishing season, to be at hand to attend to the nets laid in the sea at the mouth of the river. This hut was on the other side of the stream, which was then much swollen; but a fisherman immediately came out and crossed in a boat to where I was standing: it seeming quite an agreeable surprise to him to have a human being to speak to in that lonely spot. He complained of the mischief done to his nets by seals: and also said that great numbers of otters were living about the rocks near the river. The number of cor-

morants was very great; on firing off my gun on the top of the rocks along the coast, they flew out from beneath my feet in scores. These birds and rock-pigeons seemed the principal inhabitants of the cliffs, with the exception of some pairs of ravens and hooded crows. On Whitenhead different sea-fowl and a pair of eagles breed every year. The people say that the nest of the latter is quite inaccessible. The grouse seem nearly extinct about this district, owing to the number of their enemies, in the shape of winged and ground vermin. I was delighted, however, with the song of the ring-ousel, which was to be heard from every grove and clump of birch. Notwithstanding the peregrines and crows too, the golden plover is in great abundance.

I found on the little promontory of Heilam a number of wild flowers growing amongst the short grass, one or two of which were new to me. Though I am sorry to say I am no botanist, I seldom pass a wild flower without making its acquaintance.

The next day our drive was to Durness. The mountains at the head of Loch Erriboll are as wild as can well be imagined; consisting of irregular piles of grey rocks, thrown together in every kind of confusion. On the west of the loch there is a long slope of brown hill, down the side of which run innumerable small streams of the brightest water. The rain of the day before made them appear to great advantage, as they were all seen conspicuously from the opposite side of the bay, glittering in the gleams of sunshine, which occasionally broke through the remains of the storm. I was glad to get back to Durness after three or four weeks' absence, as the scenery is magnificent, the inn comfortable, and the landlady, Mrs. R., and her servants, most attentive, kind, and obliging. A pleasanter sojourn for botanist, naturalist, or lover of romantic scenery I do not know.

There is a very remarkable cavern close to Durness: a burn of good size disappears underground, and is seen again issuing from the rocks within this cavern, through which it runs for a short distance till it empties itself into the sea.

Numbers of the common house martin were flying about the cave, and building their nests in the niches of the rocks. In some of the dark, damp corners, where there seems to be a constant dripping from the roof, were clusters of bright green ferns, and other plants, in great variety. On some parts of the shore the rocks are quite perpendicular for a

great height—I should say about three hundred feet; in others they are worn into numerous fantastic shapes and caverns by the action of the waves.

Although the wind had now fallen, the swell was tremendous, dashing the spray half-way up the rocks. It was a curious sight to see the rock-pigeons flying rapidly into the caves, sometimes dashing like lightning through the very spray of the breakers, scarcely topping the crests of the waves, which roared and raged through the narrow caverns where these beautiful birds breed. The rock-pigeons were very numerous here, and constantly flying between their wild but secure breeding-places and the small fields about Durness. I shot a few of them, and found their crops full of green food, such as clover, the leaves of the oat, &c.; a number of small shells were also in the crop of every bird. The rock-pigeon is a very beautifully shaped little bird, rather smaller and shorter than the common house pigeon, of which it is plainly the original stock. They seem very restless, seldom remaining long in one field, but constantly rising and flitting away to some other feeding ground, with an uncertain kind of flight; but when alarmed, or going straight home, they fly with very great rapidity. They are easily tamed when caught young. The eggs seem very difficult to get at; nothing but a ladder will enable a person to reach them, and it is almost impossible either to procure such a ladder, or if procured, to carry it to the caverns where they breed.

There were two or three beautiful wild flowers near Durness which I had not seen before. They grew on the short grass that covers the summit of the cliffs. I picked up, while wandering about there, some of the small land shells with yellow and black stripes (*Helix nemoralis*), exactly similar to those which, when a child, I used to find on the South Downs, near Brighton. The rocky headlands jutting into the sea near Durness are very bold and abrupt. While looking for rock-pigeons I saw a few of the red-legged crow, or Cornish chough, passing from rock to rock, and busily employed about the broken stones searching for food.

From Durness to Rhiconnich is about fourteen miles of hilly road, passing through the same description of rocky country, abounding in wild eats, martens, and other animals of prey. There is a loch about two miles from Durness,

where I was told that char are very plentiful. All the lochs abound in excellent trout.

We reached Rhiconnich, a tolerable inn, but certainly not so well kept as many others in Sutherlandshire, at eleven o'clock, and immediately started for a lake some two or three miles off, where the osprey was said to build. The way to it was far too rocky and steep to take the boat, so we only took my swimming belt, as Dunbar offered to swim out to the nest, if not too far from the shore. We had a very rough walk of the longest two miles that I ever met with. Our route was over a continuous range of rocky ground—so broken that we seldom found a flat place to put our feet on. We did not find the right lake immediately, but at last saw from a height a larger piece of water than any we had hitherto passed, and at some two hundred yards from the shore there was the conical-shaped rock, which the osprey always seems to choose for her nesting-place.

On examining the rock with the glass we immediately saw the nest, and the white head of the bird in the middle of it. Our troubles were instantly forgotten, and although rather fagged before, we made our way over the rocks with new-found vigour. The unwillingness of the old bird to leave the nest showed that she had young ones. While Dunbar prepared to take the water, I went round to watch for a shot at the old bird. I presently saw nothing but my fellow-traveller's head, as he swam gallantly out to the rock: the old osprey flew in wide circles round and round, at a considerable height, screaming loudly at the unexpected intrusion on her domain; sometimes she swooped half-way down to the water, but still cautiously keeping at a safe distance. Before many minutes had elapsed we saw the male bird sailing high in the air, straight to the loch; on hearing the cries of his mate he seemed to quicken his flight, and soon joined her, carrying a trout in his talons. The two birds then sailed round and round the water with loud cries. When they saw Dunbar perched on their hitherto unassailed rock, and looking like a statue on a pedestal, their excitement became greater and greater; the male dropped his trout, and they both dashed wildly to and fro, sometimes at a great height and sometimes taking a rapid circuit of the lake, within half a gun-shot of the water. The next thing I saw was my adventurous companion striking out for the shore, with his cap in his teeth. In the nest he found a half-grown

young bird and an unhatched egg, both of which he brought safely to land. He remained on the spot to try to shoot one of the old birds, while I fished for an hour down a stream that ran from the loch towards the inn. I think it was the most rugged and rocky that I ever threw a fly on, but though it was difficult to imagine where trout could lie in it, I managed to half fill my basket with very nice-looking fish.

After resting ourselves for an hour or so, we again left the inn to look for another osprey's nest in the contrary direction. We could get but very vague information as to the exact point of the compass we had to make for; one person telling us that the lake was only a mile and a bit off; another that it was two miles and a bit, and so on. However, it was only about half-past five, and, with the long summer's evening before us, we cared little where the lake was, as long as we could find it at all. There were a few scattered houses along the banks of the sea loch at the end of which Rhiconnich is situated, and we made sundry inquiries at these respecting the lake, but got such very different answers from each person, that we were almost giving it up in despair; I should not say that *we* "inquired," as the whole talking was in Gaelic, and therefore carried on by Dunbar. At last we met with an old woman, who told him that there was a loch some two miles off, which had always gone by the name of the Loch of the Fishing Eagle; her Gaelic name for it being "Loch n' allan-yasker." I probably write the Gaelic name incorrectly, but that was as near as I could make out what the name sounded like; Dunbar interpreted it to me as meaning literally, the "Loch of the Eagle-fisher."

This revived our spirits, and we set our shoulders to the hill again with fresh confidence, and a steep, rough hill it was. We struck into the country in a north-west direction, keeping separate heights, in order to have a better chance of finding the lake. Having passed several lochs without observing the object of our search, I began almost to despair, and to think that we must have mistaken the whole matter—the more so, as from the aspect of the rocks and the feel of the air from the north, I was confident that the ocean must be at no great distance from us; and, indeed, that it must be washing the other side of the very next range of rocks to that on which we were. There is a certain look and feel of the atmosphere when approaching the sea, which is quite unmistakeable. We had already walked an hour and a half

straight north-west, thus making the two miles into at least five, when we came within view of a larger loch, which seemed to wind round the hills to nearly where the sea was. In this we again descried the peculiar shaped rock on which the osprey builds. Although we were too far off to distinguish either nest or bird, we at once, without hesitation, made for the loch, over the rocks and swamps of which the whole line of country seemed to consist, and our perseverance was rewarded by presently making out that one osprey was on the nest, and the other soaring above her.

Dunbar again swam off to the rock, which was about the same distance from the shore as the last one was, and found three young birds in the nest, which he brought to land in his cap. I saw the male osprey perch on a rock on the opposite side of the loch, where he sat lazily, and apparently not inclined to join the female in her rapid flight round Dunbar's head; on looking at him attentively, through the glass, I saw, or fancied that I saw, his crop much distended with food. Knowing that if this was the case he would probably remain on his perch for some time, I started off round the loch, taking a long circuit in order to approach him from behind and from above. I had not calculated on the rocks I had to climb and the passes I had to take to get at him, or I do not think that I should have undertaken the task. I had frequently to lift my dog up the steep rocks over which I had to climb. At last I came to a point from which I could get a look at the bird, and with as much care as if he had been a stag, I crept to a convenient place, and looking over, saw him still perched on the pinnacle of a rock, but quite out of reach. I found that I must still make another long circuit, or that I could not get unperceived within reach of him.

This time, on looking carefully over, I saw that he must be within shot of me, but the place I was perched on was so high and steep that it almost made me giddy to look down from it. I was completely out of breath, too; so lying down on my back, I waited a minute or two, and then scrambled down to within forty yards of the bird, and immediately above him. As my gun was loaded with a cartridge, I knew that he could scarcely escape; so standing up, I took a good look at him, expecting that he would see me and fly off the stone, and intending to shoot him flying. Whether from the earnestness with which he was watching the movements of

Dunbar, who was far below him, or from the manner in which his head-feathers projected, he did not appear to see me at all. After waiting a short time without his moving, I am sorry to say that I shot him deliberately in cold blood as he sat. He fell down the face of the rock, and lay at the bottom perfectly dead. I then had to consider how to get at him, and Fred seemed to be considering the same thing, as peering over the edge of the precipice he looked first at the dead bird and then at me, with a countenance expressive of "There is your bird now, but how are we to get at him?" This question, however, was soon settled by my marking the place, and then having made a considerable detour, I managed to reach the spot. In the meantime, Dunbar having shot both barrels at the hen bird, she took her flight straight off to the sea. After a short time she returned, but kept at a wary distance, occasionally perching on the rocks, but never remaining long in one place. It was a curious sight from the high rocks several hundred yards above the loch to watch the whole scene that was acting below, and to see the long-winged bird sailing to and fro almost immediately below my feet, and yet far out of reach of shot.

The sun began to sink below the seaward rocks, lighting up only the highest summits of the hills to the south of the lake. On the highest pinnacle of the rocks I saw several goats lying in different picturesque attitudes, to catch the last sunbeams, one old white fellow with venerable beard and long horns being the topmost point of all. Whom they could belong to it was difficult to say—they seemed as wild as red deer. Dogs who are accustomed to roe seem invariably to hunt goats. Returning homewards, Fred began to snuff the air as if he smelt something he was used to hunt. Expecting it to be a wild cat or some vermin, I answered his appealing look by allowing him to go off in pursuit of whatever it might be. Off he went, scrambling over the rocks in a state of furious eagerness. After a short time, however, a small flock of goats rushed past me with Mr. Fred in hot pursuit on their scent. Nothing would stop him, notwithstanding his usual obedience, so I left him to his chase, and some time afterwards he came up with us again, looking heartily ashamed, and having run himself well out of wind, the goats having probably got to some steep rock of refuge where no dog could follow them.

About ten o'clock, it being still quite light, we found our-

selves above the sea, with our inn apparently some miles off, probably about three, and three miles of such walking as, after our hard day's work since three in the morning, we did not much fancy. Just then, however, we saw a boat going up the glassy loch towards our inn; so hailing it as loud as we could, we managed to make the rowers hear us, and they having come to the shore, we with some difficulty scrambled down the rocks and got aboard. In the boat was what is here called a messenger-at-arms, which I fancy answers somewhat to a superior kind of constable. He had been on a strange and fruitless errand to arrest a girl of fourteen or fifteen who had for some time been in the habit of driving the sheep in the neighbourhood on to a narrow point of land that reached into the sea, and having caught them one by one she robbed them of as much wool as she could manage to strip off. Having carried on this system for some time, she at last became a perfect bugbear to the farmers, and here, luckily for us, was a well-dressed, rather dandy messenger-at-arms returning from his chase, and going straight to Rhiconnich, to which place he kindly gave us a lift, for which we were very grateful to him.

We had a beautiful row up the loch; but the cold air, after the great heat of the afternoon while climbing the rocks, joined to sitting for an hour in the boat wet through above my knees, gave me an attack of illness which eventually cut short my rambles in Sutherland.

Between Rhiconnich and Scowrie I lost my only fishing-line in a ridiculous manner. In the course of our drive we passed over a fine-looking stream, the Laxford. Thinking to catch a couple of trout for breakfast, I put my rod together, and leaving the horse and boat standing by the roadside, I determined to take a quarter of an hour's fishing, and if the trout did not rise to continue our journey. At the very first cast that I made, however, a large salmon took the fly, rather to my annoyance, knowing, as I did, that no salmon were allowed to be killed in the Sutherland rivers this season. But being once hooked, he might as well be killed, so the fight commenced by the fish running clear out of the stream in which he was first hooked, and going down like a stone to the bottom of a deep black-looking pool below. Having only single line and trout-tackle, I could not force him much, but after waiting patiently with a gentle but constant strain on the fish, in order that he might still feel some weight

upon his jaws, I at last in despair gave him such a tug that he was dislodged from his resting-place in spite of himself. Off he went, sometimes across the stream, with nearly the whole of my line out, the next moment right under my feet in the deep pool under the rock on which I was standing, and from which it was not easy to move. There I could see him shaking his head and trying to rub the hook out against the gravel: at another time he would take a sudden dart to the right and left, and again shake his head like a dog worrying a rat: but knowing that he was well hooked, and indeed not caring much whether I lost him or not, I kept so tight a rein on him as prevented his either slacking the line or rubbing off the hook, small as it was. Suddenly a new idea seemed to seize him, and shooting straight upwards, he leaped several times out of the water immediately below me. But this would not do; so finding that he could not get rid of the hook, he again rushed across the river, making the handle of the reel spin at a railway pace. He then made down the stream as fast as he could. I had scarcely any line left on my reel, so had to take a leap off the rock and follow him along the bank of the river. Presently we came to a rather rapid but not high fall, full of broken stones, and altogether a place where he would be sure to break my line if he once got into it, which he seemed determined to do, so here I halted and made a stand against all his pulling. The fish began to feel beat, and ran in again almost under my feet.

Not succeeding in slacking the line, he again rushed right across and took the fall, in spite of all I could do to prevent him. He did not cut my line as I expected, but it gave way close to the end, within a few inches of the reel, and before I could catch hold of it, I had the pleasure of seeing the line floating away, but gradually sinking as the fish carried it off towards the wider pools near the sea. Dunbar jumped gallantly into the water, but was too late to catch it, so the salmon went off with about forty yards of line and a couple of sea-trout flies hanging to his mouth. I scarcely knew whether to be angry or amused, but considering that the former would be of no use, and perhaps spoil my appetite for breakfast, I undid my rod, got into the boat, and drove off to Scowrie to breakfast, with a philosophy that rather astonished my companion.

Having called on Mr. M'Ivor, the manager of this part of Sutherland, that gentleman offered me his boat and other

facilities to enable me to go to see the island of Handa, which is situated some four miles from Scowrie, and is famous as the breeding-place of an immense number of sea-fowl. After an hour's easy row and sail over the beautiful bay of Scowrie, and skirting a range of most rugged rocks, we approached the island. On the south side, where we landed, it has the appearance of a fine green slope, with only a range of low rocks immediately adjoining, and reaching in long points into the sea. About these rocks we saw thousands of sea-gulls and cormorants, and on the point that projected farthest into the water sat a large white cat, looking wistfully towards the mainland. As all the inhabitants had left the island early in the spring for America, this cat had probably remained behind, and had made her living as she best might out of small birds, dead fish, &c. I could not help being struck with the attitude of the poor creature as she sat there looking at the sea, and having as disconsolate an air as any deserted damsel. "She is wanting the ferry," was the quaint and not incorrect suggestion of one of our boatmen. Having run our boat into a small sandy creek, we landed. Here, as everywhere round the coast, is a fishing station of Mr. Hogarth's, if a hut, the summer residence of two forlorn fishermen, can be called a fishing station. We borrowed another coil of ropes from these men, and proceeded to the northern side of the island, where the perpendicular rocks form the breeding-place of the sea-fowl. The distance across the island I should reckon at nearly two miles, and it is a continued slope of green pasture. I passed several huts, the former inhabitants of which had all left the place a few weeks before; and, notwithstanding the shortness of the time, the turf walls were already tenanted and completely honeycombed by countless starlings, who seemed not the least shy, but on the contrary kept their ground, and chattered away as if they looked on me as an intruder on what they had already established their right to.

Leaving them in undisturbed possession, I continued my way on to the north side, and in due time arrived on the summit of the cliffs which stretch the whole length of the island; and there was a sight which would alone repay many a weary mile of travel. Every crevice and every ledge of the rock was literally full of guillemots and razor-bills, while hundreds of puffins came out of their holes under the stones near the summit of the cliffs to examine and wonder at us.

The guillemots stood in long lines along the shelves of the rocks frequently within a few feet of the top whence we were looking at them. With a kind of foolish expression these birds looked at us, but did not take the trouble to move. The razor-bills, though equally tame, seemed more ready to take flight, if we had been inclined to assail them. When I fired off my gun, not *at*, but over, the birds, the guillemots only ducked their heads, and then looked up at us; whereas most of the razor-bills took a short flight out to sea, but quickly returned again to their perch on the rocks.

Being provided with plenty of rope, two stout boatmen, and also a slender-looking lad, who had volunteered to accompany us, having the repute of a good cragsman, we lowered the latter over the top in order to procure a few eggs. I was amazed at the confidence and ease with which the lad made his way from shelf to shelf, and crevice to crevice of the precipices. From habit and custom he seemed to be as much at his ease as if he had been on fair *terra firma*. As for the birds, they would scarcely move, but just stepped out of reach, croaking at him with their peculiar note.

Each bird has a single egg of a size so large as to appear quite disproportioned. The eggs are of all colours, and marked in a thousand fantastic manners, sometimes with large blotches of deep brown or black, sometimes speckled slightly all over, and others having exactly the appearance of being covered with Arabic characters. The prevailing groundwork of the eggs is greenish blue, but they vary in different shades from that colour to nearly white. The egg is placed on the bare rock, with no attempt at a nest: and it was very amusing to see the careful but awkward-looking manner in which the old bird on her return from the sea got astride, as it were, of her egg, spreading her wings over it, and croaking gently all the time. Occasionally an egg would get knocked off by some bird in taking flight from the rock, to the great indignation of its owner.

Leaving Dunbar to collect his eggs, I strolled off alone along the summit of the cliffs, sitting down here and there to watch the different proceedings of the birds; and it was a most curious sight. On lying down to look over the most perpendicular parts, the constant and countless clouds of birds that were flying to and fro suggested the idea of a heavy snow-storm more than anything else, so crowded was

their flight, and so high was the cliff. The guillemots seldom came to the top, but the razor-bills and puffins, particularly the latter, came fearlessly close to me. Indeed the puffins seemed to have the most entire confidence in my peaceable intentions, and frequently alighted so near me, that I might have knocked them down with a walking-stick. Sitting on a stone, they examined me most curiously, twisting their oddly-shaped heads to the right and left, as if to be sure of my identity. In some parts of the rocks there were great collections of kittiwakes' nests. These birds, unlike the guillemots, &c., construct a good-sized receptacle of weeds and grass for their eggs. In the midst of all this confusion and Babel of birds a pair of peregrine falcons had their nests, and on my approach they dashed about amongst the other birds, uttering loud cries of alarm and anger. Towards the east end of the island was the nest of the white-tailed eagle. The old birds flew far away immediately, and I only occasionally saw them as they soared high in the air. The nest was so completely under a shelf of rock that nothing but the ends of the outer sticks could be seen. I had not time to make any decided trial to get at it, as I had promised to be with Mr. M'Ivor at six o'clock; and my intention of visiting the place the next day was frustrated.

The rocks are curiously indented by the sea; in one place the waves have cut a kind of deep crevice the whole height of the cliffs, for a good distance into the island, through the narrow entrance of which the swell was roaring with a noise like thunder. At another part there is an island, or stack, as it is called, within a stone's throw of the mainland, but quite isolated. It is in the shape of a sugar-loaf, with a flat summit of perhaps twenty yards across. The top was covered with green herbage, and swarmed with birds of different kinds. Amongst them were great numbers of black-backed sea-gulls, both the greater and the lesser.

In the quieter parts of the cliffs were rock-pigeons and cormorants; neither of these birds seemed inclined to associate much with the crowd of sea-fowl which filled the greatest part of the rocks. Their stench alone might drive away so delicate a bird as a rock-pigeon, and bad as this was now, by the time they had hatched and reared their young it must be much worse.

The rest of the party having joined me, and the time running short, I left the island in order to fulfil my promise

of partaking of Mr. M'Ivor's hospitality at six o'clock; and I must say that after living so many days at small inns *where* I could, and *how* I could, an evening spent in the agreeable society of Mr. M'Ivor and the ladies at his house was a treat, as I had begun to feel like an uncivilized being.

On leaving the island we again saw the white cat seated on the same point of rock, and still looking anxiously towards the mainland.

Limited in size as the island of Handa is, it seems to contain a fine range of rich herbage, with a gentle slope to the south, and to be capable of feeding a considerable number of sheep or cattle. I was told, however, that much loss is sustained from the animals falling over the rocks, when they are inevitably dashed to pieces.

CHAPTER VII.

Another Osprey's Nest; Variety of Eggs—Golden Eagle; Manner of Hunting; Decrease of—Egg Collectors—Mr. Hancock's Collection—Nests of Eagles; Animals Killed by—The Mountain Hare—Fishing of Osprey.

Two miles from Scowrie, on the Rhiconnich road or near it, is a loch where the ospreys build, and where, in May, I shot the old hen, taking at the same time two eggs. Mr. Dunbar, with his usual perseverance, went to this nest immediately on our return from Handa, and found that the male bird had got another mate, and that she was already busily employed in sitting on a single egg.

It is very difficult to describe correctly the eggs of many birds: for instance, the two eggs which I took from this nest were beautifully marked with fine rich red spots, while the egg now taken by Dunbar was of a dirty white colour, marked at one end only by a splash of brown, and was also smaller than the others. In another nest, again, the eggs were considerably larger than either of these, and differently marked both as to colour and shape of spots. In the same manner one reads the description of the size of birds as being measured to inches and sixteenths of an inch, but the authors forget or are not aware of the constant difference of size in birds of the same species.

We also examined the nest that we had seen in May last near the ferry of Glendha, or Kyleska as it is also called.

On looking at it with a glass, we saw one old bird sitting, not *standing*, on the nest, and yet on Dunbar's swimming out to it he found no egg in the nest, which was exactly in the same state as when we left it three or four weeks ago; both birds, too, continued sailing and screaming over our heads, as if they had eggs or young ones to defend. This nest, like the last three that we had seen, was built on the same kind of conical rock, standing out of the waters of the lake; indeed all the lakes where this singularly shaped rock was to be seen, there also was the osprey's nest, and there it had apparently been for many a long year, as was clearly shown by one of the lochs being known by the old people only under the name of the loch of the "Eagle Fisher." The ospreys on their arrival in this country seem to seek out these rocks in the wild solitudes, and on these and these alone do they build. Trusting to their isolated and lonely situation for safety, these interesting birds hold undisputed sway over their watery kingdom. I could not help being reminded of a couple of lines which I fell in with, that seem *à propos* to this instinct of the osprey which leads her to find out and take possession of all the rocks of this particular shape that are to be found in the lochs of Sutherland:—

Ni fallat fatum *Sco'ti* quocunque locatum
Invenient Lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem.

I cannot remember whom I quote from.

We drove again through the magnificently wild country which intervenes between Kyleska and Inchnadamph. Above the shoulder of the mountain, which stands conspicuously in front of the inn, a golden eagle was hunting. The distance at which this bird can see her prey has often been talked of, but I never saw her power in this respect so fully displayed as on this occasion. The eagle was hovering so high in the air that she looked like a speck, when suddenly she distinguished a grouse on the heather, even at that immense distance. The height was too great to make a direct swoop, so the noble bird, instead of coming down straight at the grouse, almost closed her wings, and wheeled with rapid circles downwards from her first height, till she was within a more moderate distance from the ground. The grouse seemed then to have hidden itself, for the eagle remained hovering for a few minutes, turning her head in every direction as if she had lost sight of her victim; when

suddenly catching a glimpse of the poor bird, down she came with extended legs, and without seeming to more than touch the heather with her talons, she caught the grouse, and the next moment was flying rapidly away towards the highest cliffs of the mountain with her prey.

Notwithstanding the incessant war waged against these noble birds, there are still some few eagles left in certain districts; but where there is much grouse-shooting, and where, in consequence, there are many keepers, they are quite extirpated. The shepherds seem too indolent to take much trouble about killing the old birds; though the mania for collecting birds' eggs bids fair, I fear, to prevent any number of young eagles being hatched, as the eggs have become in such demand that they fetch from a pound to five-and-twenty shillings each from the numerous collectors, who, by the by, are constantly imposed upon most grossly in their collections.

The most perfect arrangement of British eggs that I ever saw, and one that is quite to be relied on for the identity of every egg, belongs to my friend Mr. Hancock of Newcastle; a gentleman who combines with the most indefatigable and zealous love of nature in all her forms, a refined taste and acute perception that no *trick of the trade* can impose upon.

Mr. Hancock's collection comprises very nearly every British bird's egg, and many varieties of each kind, which he has collected, from public-spirited motives, at an incalculable outlay of time and expense, aided by a perfect and intimate knowledge of every bird, both in its living state and habits and its anatomical structure and formation.

Notwithstanding, as I say, the prices given by London collectors, the sea eagle at any rate is tolerably common on the northern coast and islands. From its habit of building principally on the most inaccessible rocks and cliffs of the sea-coast, its nest is more secure than that of the golden eagle, which, building farther inland, and frequently in more accessible places, is liable to be killed, or to have its nest taken by shepherds, keepers, &c.

The eggs of these two eagles are very similar to each other; but the different specimens of each sort vary considerably in size and colour. I have seen golden eagles' eggs, of many different shades, from one of a pure white to one covered with light red spots: and the white-tailed eagle's eggs vary in the same manner. The eggs of both have a

fine strong character about them, which is difficult to understand without seeing the egg. The nests of both kinds are generally formed of sticks of an astonishing size, frequently as large in diameter as a man's arm—these, too, brought from a considerable distance; sometimes it is impossible to say *where* they can have procured them. The white-tailed eagle does not hesitate to use the coarse sea-ware and tangle for her nest. They build not only in the steepest possible cliff, but generally take advantage of some overhanging shelf, which, concealing the nest from above, makes it doubly secure: occasionally, however, I have known a golden eagle build in a place where an expert climber could reach the nest without the aid of ropes.

The remains of game of all kinds common in the mountains are found in great abundance about their nests when they have young; lambs also, and near the deer-forests young red deer, are taken up to the nest. I cannot say whether they carry up the latter animals whole or not, but their remains always form part of the larder found at an eagle's abode, if it is in a situation where deer abound. The weight of a new-born deer calf is not great, and once in the air the eagle would carry one easily enough. Instances have occurred of an eagle attacking a person when engaged in robbing her nest, but generally speaking they have a proper dread of man and fire-arms. Nevertheless I have known some well-authenticated instances of this fear being entirely put aside; indeed it could scarcely be otherwise with so powerful and fierce a bird as an eagle, when so weak and timid a bird as a partridge has been known to fly at and strike a man's legs like a game-cock on her young ones being too nearly approached. This I have seen happen, and therefore I can easily believe that an eagle may do the same in defence of her young.

The actual damage done to game by eagles is, in my opinion, comparatively small, the favourite food of these birds being the mountain hare, and every sportsman knows that the fewer of these animals he has on his ground the better: where they increase too rapidly (and no animal *does* increase more quickly) they become a perfect plague to grouse dogs, for however well broken your pointers and setters may be, the manner in which mountain hares run cannot fail to make the dogs fidgety and anxious, besides tainting the ground. Instead of running clear away when started, like the com-

mon lowland hare, this animal (*Lepus albus*) hops quietly from before the dog's nose, and stops to sit erect on the very first hillock she meets with within a hundred yards of the dogs. When again approached she repeats the same trick, and frequently remains for a quarter of an hour going slowly in front of the dogs, and sitting up on her hind legs in full view of them; in this manner not only tainting the ground with her scent, but as it were challenging the dogs to a trial of speed. Notwithstanding the good training one would suppose the inhabitants of the mountain ought to be in, they are easily run down even by a quick colley dog. I know of some grouse shootings where these hares have increased to such an extent, owing to the destruction of vermin, that they have been killed by hundreds in a day, and are shot down at all seasons as a nuisance. A few eagles on such ground would be of great service.

When mountain hares are not to be had by the eagles, they feed more on carrion, such as dead sheep, than birds, a good-sized dead animal of this kind being far more suited to the ravenous appetite of a golden eagle than a small bird like a grouse; and in the sheep districts there must be a constant supply, owing to accidents and disease.

In the month of May I saw the nest of an osprey on the very summit of the old castle built on a point of land (sometimes an island) in Loch Assynt. The nest was then tenantless, and had been so for two or three years. On my return in June, I was much pleased at seeing one osprey on the nest, and another sailing over the loch.

Though the osprey is, generally speaking, so rare in Britain, it frequents this locality, which seems particularly to suit it. Large tracts of the country here are almost unseen by human beings from one end of the year to the other. Covered with grey rocks, and broken up into a succession of small hollows, in most of which there are lochs, all abounding in trout, this district is exactly suited for the osprey, while it is unfit for any other animal; the sheep remain more on the extensive and grassy slopes, where they not only find plenty of food, but are more under the eye and protection of mankind. A shepherd in the broken, rocky tracts of country can have no chance of finding or seeing his flock; while, at the same time, the pasturage is worth but little, consisting wholly of rank heather. Nor is the ground at all better adapted for the grouse shooter, as he would never keep sight of his dogs for

two minutes together. For these reasons the osprey is but little disturbed, and lives unmolested for years. Even if a shepherd does pass the loch, the bird sits securely on her isolated rock, out of reach of all danger; as her nest can only be approached, in most instances, by swimming. I generally saw the osprey fishing about the lower pools of the rivers, near their mouths; and a beautiful sight it is. The long-winged bird hovers (as a kestrel does over a mouse) at a considerable distance above the water, sometimes on perfectly motionless wing, and sometimes wheeling slowly in circles, turning her head and looking eagerly down at the water; she sees a trout when at a great height, and suddenly closing her wings, drops like a shot bird into the water, often plunging completely under, and at other times appearing scarcely to touch the water; but seldom failing to rise again with a good-sized fish in her talons. The feet of the osprey are extremely rough, and the toes placed in a peculiar manner, so as to give the best possible chance of holding her slippery prey. Sometimes, in the midst of her swoop, the osprey suddenly stops herself in the most abrupt manner, probably because the fish, having changed its position, is no longer within her range; she then hovers again, stationary in the air, anxiously looking below for the reappearance of the prey. Having well examined one pool, she suddenly turns off, and with rapid flight takes herself to an adjoining part of the stream, where she again begins to hover and circle in the air. On making a pounce into the water, the osprey dashes the spray up far and wide, so as to be seen for a considerable distance.

The rapidity and certainty of stroke that a bird must possess to enable it to catch so quick a creature as the sea-trout can scarcely be understood. One would naturally suppose that the trout, in its own element, would give a bird not the slightest chance of catching it, particularly as this can only be done at one dash, the osprey of course not being able to pursue a trout under the water like a cormorant. All fly-fishers must know the lightning-like rapidity with which a trout darts up from the depth of several feet, and with unerring aim seizes the fly almost before its wings touch the water; and yet here is a large bird, hovering directly over, and in full view of the water, who manages to catch the rapid-darting trout with an almost certain swoop, although one would naturally suppose that the fish would be far off, in the depth of the pool, or behind some place of refuge, long

before the bird could touch the water. In the same manner it has often puzzled me how the terns can with such certainty pounce upon and catch so quick a little fish as the sand-eel: the tern's feet not being at all suited for holding anything, these birds catch the sand-eel with their bills.

The osprey is not nearly so early as the eagle in breeding; in fact the latter is far advanced towards hatching her eggs before the osprey arrives in Scotland. It is said the ospreys always arrive in pairs; if so, however, it is not easy to understand how, when one out of a pair is killed, the remaining bird can find a mate, which it generally manages to do. There are, too, but very few in Britain at any time, their principal head-quarters seeming to be in America; and though living in tolerable peace in the Highlands, they do not appear to increase nor to breed in any localities excepting where they find a situation for their nest similar to what I have already described. As they in no way interfere with the sportsman or others, it is a great pity that they should ever be destroyed.

CHAPTER VIII.

County of Sutherland; Variety of Climate and Soil—List of Birds; of Hawk; Owls; of the smaller Land Birds; of the Crow Tribe: Pigeons, &c.

THERE is no county in Britain with a greater variety of soil and climate than Sutherlandshire, changing gradually from the rich and highly cultivated farms on the Dornoch Firth to the grey rocks and mountains of Assynt and Scowrie. The living productions are also as varied and numerous as can be found in any district of our island. There are few British birds or quadrupeds that are not to be found in this county; the vegetable productions, cultivated and uncultivated, are as numerous and varied.

The first agriculturists in England would delight in the fine farms near Dunrobin, and might perhaps take a lesson or gain a hint from the tenants' management of cattle and wheat, most of which is destined ultimately for the London market. Though no farmer myself, I pulled in my horse for some time to admire the numerous and beautifully kept cattle and crops of Mr. Craig of Kirkton, one of the Duke of Sutherland's most skilful and enterprising tenants. His cows

would have gladdened the eyes of any Devonshire or Cheshire dairy-woman, as they did mine, a simple admirer as I am of beauty in any living animal, from a milk-cow to a field-mouse.

There is an air of well-doing and comfort about the farms on the Duke of Sutherland's property, which is delightful to the passer by, and must be doubly so to the kind and liberal landlord. Very striking too is the different appearance of the tenantry on some neighbouring properties, where, to keep up a forced and contemptible show, the proprietor *rack-rents* his tenants to the very utmost pitch of endurance.

I will endeavour to give, for the use of the naturalist, a list of the wild birds of the county; which he must take, however, *exceptis excipiendis*, as a list of an unscientific observer of nature.

To begin with the finest of our indigenous birds:—

1. The *Golden Eagle* is still to be found tolerably numerous, but gradually decreasing, in the north and north-west part of the county; though likely to be soon extirpated, owing to game-preserving and sheep-farming. To the latter the eagle is far more destructive than to the former.

2. The *Cinereous* or *White-tailed Eagle* is perhaps more numerous than the Golden Eagle; living, as it does, principally in the lofty cliffs of the sea coast, and feeding more on dead fish and food found on the shore, it does not so often fall in the way of the trapper or fox-hunter: it breeds, sometimes, amongst the inland mountains. The White-tailed Eagle, though larger than the Golden, is not so handsome nor finely formed and coloured a bird. All other varieties of the eagle found in the Highlands are merely these birds in different states of plumage, owing to sex or age, as there are only these two distinct kinds of eagle in Britain.

3. The *Osprey* is more rare and local than either kind of eagle. Though not a very heavy bird, its breadth of wing nearly equals that of the Golden Eagle. The habitat of the Osprey is confined to the north-west part of the county, where the numerous lochs, well supplied with trout, afford this bird both refuge and food. The principal, if not the only places in which it breeds, are Loch Assynt; a loch two or three miles north of the ferry of Kyleska; a loch three miles eastward of Scowrie; two of the fresh-water lakes near Loch Inchard, at the head of which is the inn of Rhiconnich; and,

again, on Loch Maddie, the Osprey occasionally frequents a nest built on an old birch-tree in an island.

4. The *Peregrine Falcon* comes next to the Osprey. There are few ranges of lofty and precipitous rock where this bird does not breed. The nest is difficult of access, and the old birds shy and wary; nor are they easily trapped, as they do not condescend to feed on any game which they have not killed themselves: grouse, plovers, and wild-fowl seem to be their principal food.

5, 6. The *Hobby* or *Goshawk* I never saw in this county, though I have no doubt of their being frequent visitors here, particularly the former. The Goshawk seems very rare everywhere in Scotland.

7. The *Merlin*, the smallest of our British falcons, is not uncommon; it builds in the long heather, and preys on small birds, snipes, &c. Bold and courageous, it will sometimes attack birds much larger than itself. Owing to its high spirit and daring the Merlin is not difficult to train for hunting, and this beautiful little bird seems to have been in former days the peculiar hawk used by ladies:—

A merlin sat upon her wrist,
Held by a leash of silken twist.

Its light weight would weary no lady's arm.

8. The *Kestrel* is common everywhere, from north to south of the county; building in every cliff and rocky burn. Though ignorant gamekeepers destroy it, the Kestrel, preying principally on mice, does far more good than harm.

9. The *Sparrow-hawk* usually frequents the more woody parts of the county. Bold and courageous, it strikes and bears away a common pigeon with apparent ease.

10. The *Kite* being a large, greedy bird, and easily caught in traps, is very rare now—common as it was a few years ago. In the wooded districts it is still, though but seldom, seen soaring with graceful flight, high in the air. By repute the Kite is a great chicken stealer, and when she has young of her own to provide for, no bird destroys more grouse, young hares, &c.

11. The *Common Buzzard* a few years ago was very common, but now has been completely exterminated, excepting in the wilder districts. With its fine soaring flight the buzzard is a most interesting bird. In all its habits it appears to me to resemble the eagle more than any other kind of hawk.

12. The *Hen Harrier* is plentiful enough in the hilly districts, and, though very destructive to game, it compensates for this in some degree by occasionally preying upon rats, vipers, &c. The cock is distinguished from afar by his nearly white plumage; while the hen in her plain dress of brown is best known by the white ring on her tail, *unde derivatur* her name of ring-tail. The young male has the same plumage as the female.

13. The *Ash-coloured Harrier* (*Falco cineraceus*) breeds near Bonar Bridge. Mr. Dunbar has taken the nest and killed the old birds in that district.

I do not know for a certainty of any other hawks breeding in this county, but probably the *Marsh Harrier*, *Honey Buzzard*, &c., are occasionally met with.

14. The *Scops'-eared Owl* has been found to breed near the Oykel river, having her nest on the heather.

15. The *Long-eared Owl* breeds commonly in the fir plantations, or in ivy-covered rocks.

16. The *Short-eared Owl* migrates to this country in October, and, unlike other owls, is found constantly in turnip-fields, rough grass, &c. This kind hunts frequently in the daytime.

17. The *Common White Owl* lives, as in England, in old buildings, rocks, &c., and as it preys almost wholly on mice ought never to be destroyed.

18. The *Common Brown* or *Tawny Owl* lives principally in the woody districts, where it is very common. In the frosty, clear nights of winter this bird is heard hooting and uttering strangely wild cries. In the spring it comes abroad at an earlier hour than any other owl; and, sitting on the topmost and leafless bough of some ash or larch tree, may be seen puffing out its neck and hooting loudly.

19. The *Snowy Owl* is not unfrequently driven over to the north and north-east coast after severe gales from that quarter.

20. A specimen of that beautiful little species called *Tengmalm's Owl* was killed in May, 1847, by Mr. Dunbar, in an old ruined factory at Spinningdale in Sutherlandshire. This and many other foreign birds may be, and most probably frequently are, driven over to the wild and solitary eastern shores of the county, without being seen or heard of.

I must here put in a word for owls. They are most unjustly and ruthlessly persecuted. Most owls are not only

harmless, but in fact they are of infinite service to mankind. Hunting chiefly by night, when almost all young birds are safe in their roosting-places, the owls prey principally, if not entirely, on mice and rats, which are then abroad in all directions plundering the farmers' produce. Where the owls have been much destroyed by pole-traps and other means, mice and rats increase to the most mischievous extent, not only destroying grain, but also doing immense mischief in young plantations, by barking and nibbling the shoots of the young trees sometimes to an almost inconceivable extent.

21. The *Spotted Flycatcher* is common enough. Tame and familiar, it builds its well-concealed nest in the creepers and ivy that grow round a window or against the garden-wall. It arrives in May and departs early in autumn. Being dependent on flies for its subsistence, the first approach of cold drives this bird from the north to seek a warmer climate.

22. The *Water-Ousel* enlivens most of the mountain streams with its lively motions and merry note. In winter it comes nearer to the sea for unfrozen water, while in summer it is seen everywhere from Cape Wrath to Dunrobin.

23. The *Common Ring-Ousel* cheers the wanderer through all the wilder parts of the county, suddenly breaking out unexpectedly into loud song in places where the eagle or grouse would be more looked for than a singing bird.

24. The *Missel Thrush* is common, breeding very early. I saw it as far northward as Tongue.

25. The *Common Song Thrush* is to be seen wherever there is wood.

26. The *Blackbird*, though not quite so common, is plentiful also.

27. The *Fieldfare* and *Redwing* arrive in great numbers, and do not depart till some time in April.

28. The *Hedge Sparrow* breeds in every hedge in all the cultivated parts of the country.

29. The *Robin*, with its usual sociability, frequents the habitations of man, as in other countries.

30. The *Redstart* breeds commonly about the woody glens and gardens near Dunrobin; but, like most other insectivorous birds, departs for the south on the first approach of winter.

31. The *Sedge Warbler*, singing like the nightingale during all the hours of darkness, is common. I heard its sweet

note constantly during the night-time: generally it sings about reedy lochs and swamps. The most northern spot at which I heard this bird was at Tongue, where its song was easily distinguished, and had a most pleasing effect amongst the harsher notes of the land-rail, redshank, sea-gulls, &c.

32. The *Willow Wren* is also met with wherever there are hedges or plantations.

There may probably be many other birds of the same family, unobserved by me, in the extensive woods of the southern parts of Sutherlandshire.

33. The *Golden-crested Wren* is very numerous throughout the year.

34. The *Fire-crested Wren* (*Regulus ignicapillus*) is sometimes met with. Mr. Bantock, the Duke of Sutherland's game-keeper, who has a collection of birds killed on the property, showed me one specimen. Being very like the golden-crested wren, this bird may be much commoner than is supposed.

35. The *Pied Wagtail*; 36. The *Grey Wagtail*; and 37. The *Yellow Wagtail*, are all numerous, particularly the two former.

38. The *Titlark* abounds in every part of the open and high districts, frequenting the summits even of the highest mountains, where it feeds on the numerous insects to be found amongst the stones and plants.

39. The *Rock Pipit* is very similar to the last-named bird; it frequents the sea-shores.

40. The *Wheatear*, coming early in the spring, ranges over the whole county, and is very abundant along the roadside in all the mountainous districts. It departs in the winter.

41, 42. The *Whin Chat* and *Stone Chat* are to be seen in all the rough grounds where furze and broom are abundant.

43. The *Great Titmouse*; 44. The *Blue Titmouse*; 45. The *Cole Titmouse*; 46. The *Long-tailed Titmouse*,—all enliven the woods and plantations throughout the year. Although not exactly migratory birds, all the Titmice as well as the Golden-crested Wren seem nearly constantly on the move, passing from tree to tree, from hedge to hedge, from wood to wood, and in fact from district to district, to wherever the insects on which they prey are most numerous.

47. The *Bohemian Waxwing*, a very beautiful bird, though not a native, is occasionally killed in Sutherland; as are

48. The *Hoopoe*; and 49. The *Rose-coloured Starling*, and probably many other continental visitors.

50. The *Sky Lark* is seen everywhere, having few enemies excepting the merlin and other small hawks.

51. The variety of Sky-lark called the *Crested Lark* is also found about Assynt.

52. The *Snow Buntings* arrive in great numbers in October. As the frost and snow increase, the male birds daily become whiter. They appear to be never at rest, flitting to and fro along the sea-shore, or other places where they find their minute food.

53. The *Corn Bunting* haunts the cultivated regions : he is never far from the corn-fields.

54. The *Yellow Bunting*, on the contrary, seems far more independent of grain ; and I saw it throughout the county wherever there were any bushes or trees.

55. The *Reed Bunting* is common also near rushy and reedy pools.

56. The *Chaffinch* ; 57. The *Greenfinch* ; 58. The *Bullfinch* ; 59. The *Goldfinch* ; 60. The *Linnet*—all common and daily-seen English birds, are everywhere to be found, excepting indeed the goldfinch, which bird is far more rare than the others, being seen only about some of the gardens and orchards in the south of the county.

61. The *Mountain-finch*, a bird not unlike the female snow-bunting in general appearance, is a frequent visitor.

62. The common *House Sparrow*, as usual, frequents the habitations of men everywhere as far as Tongue.

63. The *Siskin* is in almost every wood during the spring and summer ; nevertheless its nest is but rarely found.

64. The *Redpole* is also common : it breeds in the little thickets of birch, &c., by the sides of many of the wild mountain lakes ; and in winter may be seen in large flocks feeding on the seeds of the alder and other trees.

65. The *Cross Bill* has of late years become numerous in the fir-woods ; and will probably become far more so when the magnificent plantations of the Duke of Sutherland grow to a height suited to these amusing birds.

66. The *Common Starling* is widely distributed. The greatest number that I saw in any one place was on the island of Handa.

67. The *Goatsucker*, an insectivorous bird, although not very frequently seen, is easily recognized by the humming noise it utters, which resembles somewhat the low buzzing of a spinning-wheel.

68. The *Cornish Chough*, or *Red-legged Crow*, is rare. It fixes upon the most lofty and steep precipices for its abode. I saw it near Durness.

69. The *Raven* manages, notwithstanding the constant war waged against him, to keep his ground, and to continue tolerably numerous. I constantly see a pair or more of them playing grotesque antics, and uttering varied and strange cries upon some isolated rock on the mountain side, from which they can have a good view of any approaching enemy. Their chief location is, however, along the sea-shore, and about the rocky islands, where they can get a good supply of dead fish, seals, &c.

70. The *Carrion Crow* is rare; but,

71. The *Hooded Crow* is numerous everywhere, in spite of traps and guns. Wary and strong, they manage to evade all attempts at their extirpation, and to keep up their indiscriminate and wholesale destruction of eggs of every kind. I consider the hooded crow to be the greatest enemy to game, and indeed to all other birds, that we have. I have seen a black crow and hooded crow nesting together.

72. The *Rook* is as common in Sutherland as in any other part of the kingdom, repaying by its destruction of grubs and noxious insects the mischief it does to grain.

73. The *Jackdaw* is numerous, building both in rocks and chimneys, as its convenience or fancy happens to lead it.

74. The *Magpie* is a common inhabitant of all the woody districts.

75. That singular little bird the *Wryneck* has been killed but rarely in Sutherlandshire.

76. The *Common Tree-Creeper* is everywhere in abundance where there is wood.

77. The *Cuckoo* is in great abundance during the spring and summer, more particularly on the rocky and wild hill-sides, where there are frequent patches of birch and other underwood. I heard it at Tongue, and everywhere to the south of that place.

78. The *Kingfisher* is a rare but occasional visitor: it does not breed in Sutherlandshire.

79. The *Chimney Swallow* is common.

80. The *Swift*, according to its universal habit, wheels and screams as diligently round Dornoch Cathedral and other lofty buildings in Sutherland, as it does round the spire of a village church in England.

81. The *Sand Martin* is numerous wherever the ground suits its habits; and the *Common House Martin* is also everywhere: it breeds, too, in many of the rocky cliffs and caves of the coast. I particularly observed it in the cave of Smoo, near Durness.

82. The *Woodpigeon* is numerous wherever woods and cultivation united afford it food and shelter. In my opinion the good it does the farmer, in feeding for many months of the year on the seeds of the wild mustard, ragweed, &c., &c., is a fair equivalent for all the grain it consumes. As far north as Tongue I heard and saw this bird.

83. The *Rock Dove*, a beautiful and interesting little bird, frequents most of the rocky shores of the north coast. Inhabiting the crevices and caverns formed by the constant beating of the waves, and fearless of the surf and swell dashing constantly into its dwelling-places, this bird lives and multiplies; seldom killed by man, but probably affording a great source of food to the peregrine falcons who build in its neighbourhood.

I never saw any woodpecker in Sutherlandshire, though it is most probable that the spotted woodpecker does exist in the old woods near Dunrobin and elsewhere. Indeed I have heard that it has been seen there; but I would rather run the chance of leaving out birds that *do* occur than insert the name of any bird as being indigenous, unless I had seen it myself, or had heard of it being seen by persons whose authority I could not doubt, either as to their truthfulness or their skill.

I write these pages wholly for the amusement and information of my reader, and take down the names of birds out of my note-book, in which I have inserted them in almost every instance after having seen them myself; and the very few which I have not seen living in Sutherlandshire, Mr. Dunbar has procured in that county, and has them now preserved in his collection.

I must apologise to the scientific ornithologist for any mistakes I may have made in naming the several birds, as I am more of an out-door than an in-door naturalist; and if my notes are of any value, it will be for their truth, and because they are the result of personal observation and acquaintance with the birds. I will only request, in the words of Horace—

Si quid novisti rectius istis,
Candidus imperti: si non, his utere mecum.

CHAPTER IX.

List continued—Game birds; Destruction of by Shepherds—Plovers—Sandpipers and Snipes, &c.—Waterfowl: Swans, Geese, varieties of Ducks, Grebes, Terns, Gulls, &c.—Decrease of many kinds of birds—Egg Dealers.

THE next class of birds inhabiting Sutherlandshire that I will enumerate are those more immediately coming under the denomination of game.

84. First among which is the *Blackcock*, certainly the finest game bird of Britain. In the numerous and extensive plantations of the Duke of Sutherland this bird abounds, and extends throughout the county wherever it has the least protection from vermin and shepherds, and wherever there are any patches of wood. I saw several near the shore of Loch Laighal. It is, however, a bird easily destroyed. The shepherds and their boys generally carry guns, under the excuse of shooting foxes (which they never *do*), and in consequence black game and everything that is eatable fall a prey to these men at all seasons of the year, whilst grey crows and other destructive birds pass by unharmed.

85. *Grouse* of course abound only where vermin are kept under. In the north and north-west districts of the county, excepting in one or two small districts, grouse are rare indeed. In Assynt, where a clever keeper and trapper is kept, these birds have increased rapidly within a few years. The Duke of Sutherland, I believe, only preserves that part of the country nearer to Dunrobin, and which is within reach of his friends. Even if all his immense territory were preserved and protected from vermin, &c., a great part of it, from its distance, would be useless as shooting-ground. No bird is handsomer or more game-like than a cock grouse in the spring time, as he struts and crows with erect comb on some hillock, scarcely taking notice of the passer-by.

86. The *Ptarmigan* is tolerably numerous on the more lofty ranges of mountains, such as Ben Hee, Ben Cleebriek, Ben Laighal, and many others, the summits of which this bird frequents, seldom coming down to the heather, but living, a true child of the mist, above all vegetation, amongst the rocks and loose stones. The *Ptarmigan* requires protection as well as the grouse, more particularly from shepherds and their boys.

87. The *Common Pheasant* is nowhere abundant in Sutherland; in the lower districts, near Dunrobin, there are

some, but no great number; sufficient, however, to make a beautiful variety in the game of the county.

88. *Partridges*, on the contrary, are very numerous in all the southern range, where the finely cultivated fields, bordering on the young plantations, offer every advantage for their breeding. I have occasionally seen partridges in very wild parts of Sutherland, where no bird but grouse would be looked for.

89. The *Quail* appears occasionally near Dunrobin. This bird may be here oftener than is supposed; for, arriving when the wheat is at a sufficient height to conceal it, seldom taking wing, and departing before the crops are well off the ground, its presence can only be known by its peculiar call or whistle.

90. The *Landrail*, as I have before said, is in every corner of the county where it can find a patch of corn. I heard it at Tongue in great numbers; also at Heilam Ferry in a small patch of oats. The gamekeeper at Tongue told me that he kills it frequently during the winter.

From the landrail one naturally comes to that class of birds which comprise the plovers, &c.

91. The *Golden Plover* is very numerous in all the higher districts during the breeding season. Its eggs are beautifully marked and very large in proportion to the size of the bird. I saw these plovers on all the elevated moors: in winter they collect and descend towards the shores.

92. The *Dotterel*, a rare bird anywhere, breeds on Cleebriek, but is by no means numerous.

93. The *Ring Dotterel* is very numerous, breeding near the lakes and streams, and also near the sea-shore: they leave the inland parts of the country entirely on the approach of winter.

94. The *Pewit* or *Lapwing* is numerous everywhere from the end of February to the end of October.

95. The *Turnstone* is only a visitor, not breeding here.

96. The *Godwit*.

97. The *Sanderling*.

98. The *Knot*, and a great variety of *waders* and *sandpipers* which, not being thoroughly acquainted with throughout all their changes of plumage, I cannot enumerate, swarm on all sandy and muddy creeks and bays of the county. It would require many years, and a most accomplished naturalist, to describe accurately all the varieties that are to be found on

these coasts. I am confident that, at different times, almost every known kind of shore-bird could be procured.

99. The *Oyster-catcher* breeds here and remains during the winter, always finding a good supply of food.

100. The *Curlew*, too, breeds on all the high moors, and takes to the shores in the winter.

101. The *Dunlin*, and

102. *Common Sandpiper*, also breed near most of the lakes and streams.

103. The *Jack-snipe* is said to breed in one or two localities, as is also

104. The *Great Snipe* (*Scolopax major*); but I never was quite satisfied with the authenticity of these accounts, particularly as regards the jack-snipe; for the very man whom I was referred to as having seen this bird breeding (Mr. Ross, the keeper at Tongue) distinctly assured me that it *never* had been seen in that country in the breeding season.

105. The *Common Snipe* breeds in every locality suited to its habits.

106. The *Woodcock*, of late years, has commenced breeding also in most of the large woods, laying four large eggs, similar in colour to those of the snipe.

107. The *Redshank* breeds also very commonly in all marshy parts of the hills.

108. The *Greenshank* is not so common, but I saw it breeding about Loch Naver, Loch Laighal, and in many other places throughout the county.

109. The *Water-rail* is not uncommon in the winter, but from its retired habits is seldom seen: it may perhaps breed in the larger tracts of reeds and rushes, though I have never heard of its nest being found.

110. The *Whimbrel* breeds in the northern and most retired parts of the country; I saw several on the island of Handa in the month of June.

111. The *Heron* is common everywhere, though the only breeding-place that I know of is near Loubcroy, on the Oykel River, where these breed on an island in a loch situated some two miles from the roadside.

112. The *Bittern* is rare: but I have heard its cry near Shinness, on Loch Shin.

113. That very pretty and elegant little bird the *Red-necked Phalarope* is found in the breeding season, but only

rarely. I saw a pair close to Loch Naver in the month of June : they evidently had a nest not far from the spot.

The varieties of water-fowl are very numerous, and no doubt the county is visited by nearly every known European species at different seasons.

114. The *Common Wild Swan*, and

115. *Bewick's Swan*, are not uncommon during the winter. Their appearance in any of the sea-lochs, such as Loch Erriboll, is considered to foretell severe weather.

116. The *Grey Lag Goose* breeds in Loch Maddie, Loch Laighal, Loch Urigil, &c. ; but I am sorry to see that these fine birds have every chance of being entirely driven away from their haunts.

117. The *Bean Goose* breeds on Loch Shin.

118. The *White-fronted Goose* is a winter visitor, and the rarest and handsomest species that frequents this country.

119. The *Brent Goose* comes to most of the inlets of the sea in immense numbers during the winter : it is one of the best wild-fowl for the table.

120. The *Bernicle Goose*, though an occasional visitor, is much more rare than the last-named species. The brent goose is more frequent on the east coast, while the bernicle keeps to the western side of the county.

121. The *Sheldrake* breeds very commonly about the sandy parts of the coast.

122. The *Pintail*, a very beautiful bird, visits this county in the winter.

123. The *Common Mallard* is everywhere to be found ; as is its miniature likeness,

124. The *Teal*, during the whole year.

125. The *Widgeon* breeds in a few localities, for instance, near Loch Naver : in the winter it is one of the most numerous of all wild-fowl.

126. The *Eider Duck* breeds on some islands at the entrance of the Kyle of Tongue.

127. The *King Duck* is seen in the same district, but only rarely.

128. The *Velvet Duck* is in abundance during the winter on the east coast.

129. The *Common Pochard*,

130. The *Scaup Duck*,

131. The *Golden Eye*, are all common during the winter ;

the latter is said to breed here occasionally : I saw a pair about the 15th of May in Loch Laighal.

132. The *Long-tailed Duck* is very numerous on the east coast during the winter.

133. The *Merganser* breeds about some of the lakes near Scowrie and elsewhere.

134. The *Goosander* also is not uncommon.

135. The *Sclavonian Grebe*, and

136. The *Little Grebe*, are permanent inhabitants : the latter is to be found in most localities.

137. The *Great Northern Diver* frequents the northern parts of the county. I saw this bird near Durness about the 14th of May. The people tell me that it is frequently seen about that coast accompanied by a young one, apparently just hatched : its nest, however, has not been found.

138. The *Black-throated Diver* is gradually diminishing in number, but still breeds in the lakes of Assynt, Loch Laighal, and elsewhere.

139. The *Red-throated Diver* breeds also in the northern parts of the county.

140. The *Foolish Guillemot* breeds in countless numbers on the island of Handa and elsewhere.

141. The *Black Guillemot* is much rarer, but I saw it near the same island in June.

142. The *Puffin* is also numerous in Handa, &c., as is

143. The *Razor-bill*.

144. The *Little Auk* is a winter and occasional visitor.

145. The *Cormorant*, and

146. The *Shag* breed in many different places along the coast. I saw great numbers of them about Whiten Head, Handa, &c., &c.

147. The *Gannet* breeds on some rocks off the northern coasts.

Of Terns I have seen the following varieties :—

148. The *Roseate Tern*.

149. The *Common Tern*.

150. The *Arctic Tern*.

151. The *Lesser Tern* ;

and no doubt there are many other varieties.

152. The *Black-headed Gull* breeds on inland lakes in great numbers.

153. The *Kittiwake Gull* breeds on the rocky cliffs of Handa and elsewhere.

154. The *Common Gull* breeds also in great numbers on the rocky coasts and on different islands.

155. The *Greater Black-backed Gull*, and

156. The *Lesser Black-backed Gull* breed in great numbers on different lochs: I particularly observed both kinds on Loch Laighal. No doubt many other species of the sea-gull and skua, besides a great variety of wild-fowl, visit this county at different seasons; but I am determined only to enumerate those that I have seen myself. No part of Britain, or indeed scarcely of Europe, is better adapted for a resting-place for migratory birds on their way to and from their more northern breeding-places; and the extensive lakes and wilds afford shelter to many that are not generally known to remain in Britain during the summer. The numerous bays and inlets of the sea, leaving at low water great tracts of sand and mud, afford food during the winter for innumerable wild-fowl and waders.

Many of the finer kinds both of land and water-birds certainly are becoming almost extinct, being hunted down by both gamekeepers and egg-dealers, the latter being frequently a set of mercenary and ignorant men, deceived themselves and deceiving others as to the kind of eggs which they offer for sale; and instead of furthering the knowledge of natural history, rendering it more obscure by passing off one egg for another, and having recourse to as many tricks as a horse-jockey in selling their specimens, which are often bought by people who have not the slightest knowledge of the natural history of the bird whose eggs they fancy that they are buying.

CHAPTER X.

Deer Hounds—Deer Forest in Sutherlandshire—Effect of the Forests on Deer
—The Stag Casting his Horns—Hinds and Calves—Courage of the Hind
—Poaching Shepherds—Value of Horns—Fighting of Stags—Highland Forester—Breed of Deer-Hounds.

WHILE staying at the inn at Aultnaharrow, I saw several brace of deer-hounds of the true old Scotch breed. These dogs, which belonged to Lord Ellesmere, were kept close to the inn, at the house of one of his Lordship's foresters. The tract of country preserved as a deer forest comprises a most extensive range of mountains, the best in all Scotland for the purpose. Reaching away to the north-west and west, the

forest takes in corrie after corrie, and mountain after mountain, of the most wild and romantic character. Fitted, too, for scarcely any other purpose than as a refuge for wild animals, the most determined utilitarian could not say that the ground was wasted, nor suggest a better use to which to apply it. It is far too barren to make sheep farming remunerative, and any other way of attempting to make the mountains in that district useful to mankind would be labour thrown away.

In this fine range the red-deer daily increase in number; so much so, that I have no doubt that, unless they are systematically shot down, they will, in the course of some few years, degenerate in size and beauty from the ground being overstocked; for, although there is plenty of room in the surrounding wild mountains for the deer to distribute and disperse themselves, still so much do they dislike being disturbed, and so determinedly do they adhere to the forests where neither sheep nor shepherds annoy them, that while these quiet places are overstocked, the deer are almost wholly drained out of all the surrounding mountains. I speak here only comparatively, for of course red-deer are to be found almost everywhere throughout the county; still all the sheep-farms have far fewer deer on them than they had before the forest was made, notwithstanding that the number of these animals is probably greater on the whole than it was then. Certain slopes and hill-sides even close to the main road are never without deer, and the passer by seldom travels many miles without seeing some of these noble animals. They seem used to the sight of people on the road (although so few *do* travel by it); and on a carriage coming into sight the stag scarcely stops his feeding for a longer time than is sufficient for him to take a good gaze at his natural enemy, when he again continues his rapid grazing, although perhaps not much more than a rifle-shot from the road-side. In the middle of the day the deer are seldom to be seen except by a practised eye, as they are then at rest and lying quietly, with little more than their head and neck above the rough heath. In the early morning or towards evening they feed downwards towards the grassy sides of the rivers and burns. In very hot weather the stags, tormented by midges and flies on the lower grounds, keep on the high mountains and ridges, where they have the advantage of every cool breeze that blows. Hardy as he naturally must be, the stag

does not seem to like exposing himself more than is necessary to extremes of heat and cold. In this respect the hinds seem more hardy than their antlered lords. For some time after they lose their horns in the beginning of May the stags seem to feel helpless and unarmed, retiring to out-of-the-way places, where they remain as quiet and stationary as they can, not wandering far from their hiding-place, till their horns having in some measure grown, they feel more able to keep their place amongst their fellows. I have often heard people affirm that they hide their horns invariably on casting them, but this is by no means the case; the horns are constantly found; I have frequently picked them up myself, and have seen great numbers that have been found on the hills. A man walking across a rugged and extensive range of mountain cannot expect to find very often an object so little conspicuous as a stag's horn, unless he is a forester or keeper, and as such living amongst the deer at all times. There is no doubt, too, that deer have the habit of chewing and breaking up horns or bones, or any substance of the kind, that they find in their wanderings; in the same manner that cattle in a field will chew for hours together a bone, old bit of leather, or any other hard substance, to the neglect of the clover or grass, or whatever food they may be surrounded by. It is probable also that the deer trample under the heather, in the course of their working at it, any horn that comes in their way.

When about to calve, the hinds retire to the most lonely and undisturbed places, where there is little risk of their young meeting with enemies while unable to escape. For a few days they appear to keep them in these safe solitudes, visiting them little during the daytime; but as soon as the calves have acquired a certain degree of strength, they become the inseparable companions of their mothers. Where the hind is, there is the calf following its dam over hill and dale. At first they are covered with white marks, but, losing these, they are of a darkish brown, and are well clothed with long hair by the approach of the winter. Although not coming to full maturity for several years, the growth of young deer is very rapid for the first six or eight months. Did they not gather strength rather quickly in proportion to their after growth, it would be impossible for them to keep company with the hinds in their numerous flights over mountainous and dangerous passes, impelled on-

wards by the sight or scent of some enemy real or imaginary. Eagles and foxes both make prey of the newly-born calves; though I am told that the parent will defend her young courageously and effectively against either of these enemies if she happens to be at hand when they are attacked: her manner of defence is by striking with her fore-feet—a species of warfare in which the red-deer hind is a most active enemy, and difficult to cope with. I have seen one, when wounded and standing in a burn, raise herself up and lash out with her fore-feet (armed as they are with sharp and hard hoofs) in a manner which made it a service of no slight danger to approach her. Several times did a hind in this manner strike at and knock under water a dog of the most determined courage that I had slipped at her; and equally ready was she to kick out with both her hind-legs at once, so that it was by no means safe or easy to get at her; till at last the dog, after being sadly knocked about, left the water, and sprang upon the deer's back from an overhanging rock, seizing her by the ear and then by the throat in a manner that soon subdued the poor animal. Having more than once seen a hind defend herself most courageously in this manner, I can easily believe the stories that I have been told of their success in defending their young against fox or eagle, notwithstanding the cunning of the former and the almost irresistible swoop of the latter enemy.

Deer, from their size and strength, are secure from the attacks of every other wild animal of the country.

Notwithstanding the vigilance and care of the foresters, who in this county are, I believe, all men of honesty and experience, the shepherds manage to kill many a deer at all seasons; nor is it possible for any number of keepers to prevent this entirely: though they may be as watchful as possible, the shepherd, from being constantly on the hill amongst the deer, and knowing by experience all their haunts at every time of day and at every season, has advantages over the keeper that no vigilance of the latter can counterbalance. A shepherd has for some days perhaps observed that a particular fine stag, with noble head and in good condition, frequents some certain grassy burn to feed in. There he grazes daily, going thither about four o'clock every evening; and having done so undisturbed several times in succession, he becomes careless, and on leaving the braeside on which he rests throughout the day, he feeds rapidly down

the burnside till he arrives at the favourite spot of grass. The shepherd, knowing well that the deer will continue on this feeding spot until disturbed, watches his opportunity when the forester has taken some other direction, or has not left his home, or in fact when the coast is clear: he then takes his gun out of the stock, and easily concealing the two parts till he is safe in the solitudes of the mountain, he betakes himself to some hiding-place within an easy shot and to leeward of the place which he well knows the stag will visit at the feeding time. Having looked well to his copper cap or priming, he waits patiently till the animal is within twenty or thirty yards of him, when a handful of slugs or a bullet settles the business. The four quarters are then conveyed home as convenience and opportunity suit. If the antlers are good, they are another source of profit, there being a ready sale for them to some gun-maker or bird-stuffer, many of whom have constant correspondence with the shepherds, keepers, &c., for the purpose of buying deers' heads, birds' eggs, skins, &c., which they resell to visitors at Inverness, or even to sportsmen who, taking the stag's head to England with them, pass it off as a trophy of their own skill and prowess. I have known instances of this kind, although it is difficult to understand how a man can exhibit as his own shooting, and nail up over his hall-door, a stag's head, which he has bought for three or four pounds instead of shooting it, without being ashamed to behold such a memento of his own weakness and want of good faith.

In my opinion, the general run of the old stags' heads in Sutherlandshire are the handsomest of any in Scotland, in the way the horns are set on the head and in the shape of the horns themselves. The largest and oldest heads that I have seen in that county form a fine, widely-stretched circle, the tops of the antlers arching inwards towards each other. I never myself saw horns with so fine a spread and arch in any other county, though I do not pretend to say that such may not be seen elsewhere. A nobler sight than a herd of well-antlered stags standing clearly defined on the horizon, and combined with the surrounding scenery and all the *et cæteras* of the country which they inhabit, can scarcely be imagined. On the wide grassy plains between Loch Shin and Aulnaharrow, and between Ben Hee and Ben Cleebreck, I have generally seen a number of hinds near the roadside;

but the stags, or at any rate the older stags, keep higher up the mountains.

These plains must be excellent ground for running the deer-hounds on, and I wished much that I could have remained long enough in the country to see some of the dogs run a deer; but being summoned at the time to England, I was obliged to depart without even the treat of passing some days in the deer forest, notwithstanding the Duke of Sutherland's kind permission. Of course I should have gone "*unarmed*," it being as early as the middle of June; but I am happy to say that (although sportsman enough in my way) I can enjoy watching and making acquaintance with the actions and habits of so fine an animal as the stag quite as much as endeavouring to kill him. Without pretending to disown my love of deer-stalking, I find an enjoyment in watching unseen, and patiently, the animals in a manner which one *could not* do, supposing oneself to be rifle in hand; for then, such is the passion of mankind for the chase, that I fancy few people exist who would not be more intent on killing the stag than in quietly looking at him. In the present instance, however, I had little leisure for even looking at the deer.

There is a constant succession of fine mountains from Assynt down to near Dunrobin Castle, all frequented more or less by deer; and the gamekeeper at the castle told me that they came down into the woods close to his house, where from good feeding and quiet they became very fine and fat, getting into condition very early in the season. I have frequently seen deer late in the evenings fight furiously with their horns, till the noise of their antlers striking against each other sounded far and wide. The two hostile stags meet face to face, and charging straight at each other like two rams, each endeavouring to turn the flank of the other as if to get a chance of goring him. The weakest, however, seemed always to have a prudent knowledge of when he was overmatched, and, having leaped quickly aside to avoid being gored, he generally retreated without injury. Sometimes, when equally matched, they fight together in this manner for a long time, making a great rattling with their horns.

Deer-stalking with the Sutherland Highlander seems an almost invincible passion. His constant thoughts and dreams are about the mountain corrie and the stag: get him into conversation on any subject, and by some means it invariably

comes round to deer and deer-stalking. He has stories without end, handed down from father to son, of wonderful shots, and dogs that never failed to pull down their stag. On most points silent and reserved, on this one he is talkative and eloquent. No man, too, has a greater taste for, and a more correct conception of the beauties of nature: he points out to you with admiration the very mountain slope, the very corrie that you have already marked down in your mind as surpassingly grand. At first you may think him a reserved and rather morose man, but when he finds out that you are not only a brother of the craft, but also a fervent admirer of the natural beauties of his favourite lochs and corries, his heart opens, and he will go through fire or water to serve you: his expression of face alters, he takes you under his protection, and leads you to points of view which you would have travelled fifty miles to see; and, in fact, enters into all your wishes and thoughts with tact and eager desire to please you. Mercenary and greedy as, I am sorry to say, Highlanders in many parts of the country have become, I did not find this the case in Sutherland. The shootings not having been let much, the country-people are not yet spoiled, but still retain in a great measure the natural good feeling, the air of high-bred civility of which most mountaineers have a far greater share than men of the same rank of life brought up in the lowlands.

Though a Highland deer-stalker may sometimes break loose and have a day's bout at whisky, he is not, generally speaking, at all an intemperate man: two weaknesses he may have—snuff and smoke; the mull, with its spoon of wood or eagle's quill (that not a grain may be lost), and the well-smoked and short clay-pipe, are his constant companions. If he misses his stag after a severe stalk, he takes a few whiffs to console himself: if he succeeds, and has his hand already on the prostrate body of the object of his pursuit, the pipe comes into play. The first thing in the morning, while looking from the shealing door to see which way the wind blows, there is the pipe between his teeth; and when returning from his day's work, he smokes the pipe of retrospection, while he calls to mind all the different hits and failures of the pursuit. Having reached home, fed himself and dogs, and had his moderate allowance of whisky, twenty to one but he walks out, pipe in mouth, to see which way the clouds are drifting, so as to speculate on the weather

of the morrow, or perhaps to listen to the nocturnal cries of the birds and animals of the mountain or loch. You seldom see him fill his pipe; it seems ready charged, always fit for action, and also self-extinguishing in some inexplicable manner; as on your asking him a question suddenly when out on the hill, if smoking, ten to one but he puts the pipe, with red-hot tobacco in it, at once into his waiscoat pocket, where it dies a natural death in an innocent manner that I would recommend no one else to expect his pipe to imitate.

Summer or winter the Highland deer-stalker puts on his plaid when going out, and, if he does not carry a gun, has in his hand some favourite stick (or "staff" as he calls it) made of hazel or juniper, and cut during some excursion to the low country. His telescope, though good, generally refuses to be seen distinctly through by any eyes but his own; somehow no one else can hit off the focus. Though caring little for grouse shooting, he is usually a fisherman, and can throw a fly well enough on occasion, and a present of salmon flies goes straight to his heart.

To return to Aultnaharrow. I was much pleased with the kennel of deer-hounds in charge of the forester there; some of them fine, powerful dogs, fit to pull down any stag. This breed of dogs, which a few years ago was almost extinct, or at any rate only in the hands of a very few Highland proprietors, is now rapidly increasing, not only in numbers, but also in size, strength, and other good qualities. The three finest dogs of the kind that I ever saw were at Foyers, on Loch Ness; and I believe they were equally admired by a gentleman far more fit to judge of them than I am, Mr. Grant of Glenmorrison, who was kind enough to take me to see them. The two young dogs were undoubtedly among the finest of their race, for with the strength of a lion they were made as much for speed, and as compactly put together, as the highest bred grey-hound at Newmarket. They had all the points and qualifications of a thorough-bred grey-hound, from their head to their round cat-like feet. Indeed I suppose that owing to neither trouble nor expense having been for some time past spared by many English sportsmen in improving this breed of dogs, the deer-hound is now to be found in as great perfection as ever it was.

Like other greyhounds these dogs do not continue fit for service for more than six years. The violent pace and the strains they are liable to, from the nature of the ground they

run on, and the strength of the animal they pursue, all combine to make them show symptoms of old age at an earlier time of life than most other hunting dogs. In rearing these dogs it is absolutely necessary that they should have nearly constant liberty, without which they neither come to their full strength nor development. At the same time they are sadly inclined to sheep killing and other mischief: most dogs learn this fault at first by being allowed to go about amongst very young lambs, which are invariably tempting objects of pursuit to wild and mischievously disposed puppies.

I am much inclined to crossing the deer-hound with the mastiff or fox-hound. The former I prefer as giving strength and determination in seizing and holding a stag. This cross, too, imparts to the disposition of the dog a kind of blood-thirstiness, which is invaluable in tracking and pursuing wounded deer, and this is the principal use of all deer-hounds. No forest will bear too frequent coursing; the deer will take themselves off to quieter ground without fail, being far more effectually scared away by the hound than by the rifle.

CHAPTER XI.

Agriculture in Sutherlandshire—Facilities of Reaching the County—Caledonian Canal—Travelling in Sutherland—Inns, Excellent Management of—Lairg—Tongue—Durness—Scowrie—Inchnadamph—Inveran—Conclusion of Sutherlandshire.

I WILL now finish my sketches (hurried and imperfect as they are) of Sutherlandshire by recommending my readers, who may wish for a week's enjoyment, to follow my example and travel round that county; there are few who would not derive much pleasure and amusement by doing so. The agriculturist and improver of land would be interested by seeing the different stages of husbandry in the county, from the perfectly cultivated farms and cattle of the southern parts, to the rude and primitive method of raising small crops of oats amongst the rocks of the north and north-west, where the ground is turned up by ancient and quaintly-shaped substitutes for spades—ploughing being quite impracticable in many places; at the same time that about Tongue, near as it is to the extreme northern point of Britain, both the mode of cultivation and the crops would do credit to many a southern county of England.

The sheep, black cattle, ponies, &c., in many parts of the county, are not to be surpassed in Britain. The naturalist, whether his tastes incline to botany, ornithology, or any other line of this interesting pursuit, will find ample means of enriching his cabinets; while I can safely promise the lover of fine and varied scenery a treat that would repay him for a far more difficult and weary journey.

There are three ways of reaching Inverness from Edinburgh: by the steamers which ply along the east coast; by the Highland road, which passes through the centre of the country; or by Aberdeen—the latter is the least interesting road, as it passes through the bleakest and least beautiful part of Scotland. The Edinburgh and Inverness steamer, the “Duke of Richmond,” is comfortably enough arranged, and makes good way through the water, but the number of stoppages at different ports is tiresome to the traveller whose object is to reach the end of his journey. The Highland road has a paucity of public conveyances on it at present, but passes through a fine and characteristic range of country. I have occasionally taken the circuitous route going from Edinburgh to Glasgow, and thence up the Caledonian Canal to Inverness; and this is after all, though apparently rather longer, much the most interesting and the least fatiguing manner of reaching Inverness. Not being exposed to rough water, the passengers by these steamboats are able to enjoy the beauties of the whole route; and they are constant and varied throughout the voyage. Independent of the very great natural beauty of the country through which the canal passes, there is a constant succession of objects of historical and legendary interest: while the captains of the boats are well versed in the history of these localities, and also are most obliging and attentive to all strangers, in pointing out and explaining everything that is worth seeing. The managers and proprietors of these steamers at Glasgow are most ready and obligingly anxious to attend to the comfort and amusement of travellers, and to aid them in their movements in any direction, in the most easy and economical manner. No complaint (if one is ever necessary), made against any of the servants of the company, for neglect of their duty, &c., will pass unheeded by the proprietors. In fact, the tourist can scarcely be in better hands, or take a trip that will repay him better than that by the Caledonian Canal.

From Inverness to Tain or Invergordon the way is easy, by land or sea. Once there, the traveller in Sutherlandshire has two ways of going through the county—either by hiring a horse and suitable machine, or by travelling by the mail-carriage, a kind of open phaeton, which takes (as well as I remember) several passengers: this vehicle goes twice a week northwards, and as often south. I rather prefer the more independent way of hiring a horse, which ought to be done for four or five shillings a day, exclusive of his keep. Although hay is not always to be had, I never failed getting good oats at the inns, and good grass, so that a horse is never at a loss. From Tain or Invergordon the best route to the north of Sutherland is to Argye, near Bonar Bridge; a good inn and excellent landlord. From thence to Lairg is eleven miles.

At Lairg is another excellent inn, in a most beautiful situation. Lairg to Aulnaharrow, twenty-two miles; thence to Tongue, seventeen miles; Tongue to Durness, eighteen miles, with a resting inn at Heilam Ferry, or Loch Erriboll, about half-way.

At Durness I should be content to pass many a day. The inn is one of the best in Sutherland, and the landlady, Mrs. Ross, makes her visitors as comfortable as they can desire; at the same time her charges are as moderate as the most economical traveller could wish. The country round Durness is full of magnificently wild scenery, and the sheltered little sandy bays afford excellent bathing.

Durness, by Rhiconnich, to Scowrie, is about twenty-six miles. Scowrie should be another resting-place: there is much to see, and a good inn. For my own part, I have a most pleasing recollection of Scowrie, and of the hospitality of Mr. M'Ivor (the Duke of Sutherland's manager in that district.)

Scowrie to Inchnadamph, by Kyleska Ferry, still takes the traveller through a country, every step of which is most splendidly wild and picturesque. Inchnadamph inn, at the foot of Ben More, and at the head of Loch Assynt, is another good resting-place. Loch Inver, fourteen miles from Inchnadamph, has also an excellent inn, and is well worth going to see. To Inveran inn, on the Shin river, from Inchnadamph, is thirty-two miles; but with two inns on the way, Altannan-cealgach and Oykel, at both of which tolerable accommodation may be had. Inveran is a small house, but as

cleanly and comfortably kept as any inn in Britain. I never knew an angler on the Shin river who did not say the same of the inn at Inveran; the landlady, in her homely, "motherly" way, makes her guests so comfortable that they always leave her with regret.

All the inns on the Duke of Sutherland's property (almost without exception) are well kept, cleanly, and moderate in their charges, to a degree that the most suspicious and fastidious cockney traveller can find no fault with; and there is none of that paltry imposition which one meets with so frequently in remote places in other parts of the Highlands, where a stranger is looked upon as fair game for plunder.

My tastes have generally led me to the north and north-west of Sutherland, but there is also much to interest and much to see in the eastern parts of the county. Going by Dornoch and Golspie, both excellent inns, thence along the coast to Brora and Helmsdale, two fishing colonies, and turning northwards to Bighouse, the traveller can either return by Tongue or by Strathnaver, a beautiful green strath which takes him to Aultnaharrow.

My description of the different routes is short and imperfect, as I do not pretend to write a "road" or "guide" book; but I simply give this sketch as the result of my own note-book, hoping that it may be of use to anyone wishing to see the most interesting county in Britain, and one of the least visited. Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, &c., lie more in the way of grouse-shooters and sportsmen, and are consequently more known and written about than Sutherland, although the latter can be travelled through with more ease, comfort, and economy than either of the other named counties.

I must conclude my rambles in Sutherland, but hope that some more able and scientific pen than mine will be found to describe the objects of natural history and of interest in the county, which I have merely glanced at. These notes I now commit to the public with all their errors and imperfections, hoping that the fact of the incidents and remarks contained in them, being the result of the personal and unprejudiced observation of one more skilled in using the rifle than the pen, will induce the reader to excuse their faults, and to look more favourably on my scribbling than any merit of the notes themselves may deserve.

FIELD NOTES FOR THE YEAR.

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CHAPTER XII.

JANUARY.

Wood-pigeons—Feeding of Widgeon and Mallards—Wild Fowl—Water Rail
—Wild Duck Shooting—Change of Colour in Trout.

DURING the month of January the wood-pigeons commence feeding greedily on the turnips. They do not, in my opinion, dig into the roots with their bills, unless rabbits or rooks have been before them to break the skin of the turnip. In fact the wood-pigeon's bill is not at all adapted for cutting into a frozen and unbroken turnip. The crops of those which I kill at this season are full of the leaf of the turnip; and in feeding on these, they appear not to attack the centre or heart of the green leaf, but to eat wholly the thin part of it. The wood-pigeon feeds more particularly on the leaf of the Swedish turnip, as being most succulent.

In the garden I see the titmice searching for, and feeding on, the nests and eggs of the common garden spider. The little blue tomtit is of great service to gardeners, as a destroyer of many kinds of insects which would increase to a most injurious extent without the aid of these prying little fellows.

The thrushes begin to sing, and the corn-bunting and yellow-hammer to utter their spring note.

In shooting along the bay and the streams, &c., which run into it, I have been astonished this year (1846) by the numbers of a new visitor to this country, the little auk. This bird, though so rarely seen here, appears to have been driven over this season in great flocks; they are everywhere, and so tame as to be easily knocked down with sticks and stones.

The widgeon and teal have now nearly acquired their full plumage; occasionally I bring home a drake-widgeon in his

perfect beauty of feather, but very few of them have entirely put off their sober brown. The mallard has for some time been in high beauty, and is most valuable to the dresser of salmon-flies.

I see the widgeon come regularly now, at the ebb of the tide, to feed on the grassy banks which are left uncovered by the receding of the water. They first feed as they swim round the edges of the small islands and banks; but when the tide begins to recede, the birds come out on the banks and graze like geese.

This season the wild ducks have found out a new kind of food—the remains of the diseased potatoes which have been left in the fields. My attention was first called to their feeding on them by observing that my domesticated wild ducks had managed to dig well into a heap of half-rotten potatoes, which had been put partly under ground, and then covered over with a good thickness of earth, as being unfit for pigs or any other animal. However, the wild ducks had scented them out, and although well supplied with food, they had dug into the heap in all directions, feeding greedily on the rotten potatoes; in fact, leaving their corn for them. I then found that the wild ducks from the bay flew every evening to the potatoe-fields to feed on the roots which had been left; and so fond were they of them, that I often saw the ducks rise from the fields in the middle of the day—in the evening it was always a sure place to get a brace or two. The mallard is very omnivorous at this season: in the crop of one killed were oats, small seed, shrimps, and potatoes, all the produce of his reseaches during the preceding night.

We find the remains of the little auk everywhere; some I have seen amongst the furze bushes, &c., at the distance of fully four miles from the sea. They appeared to have been driven there by the wind, and to have died entangled in such unaccustomed ground. The remains which I found did not appear to have been brought by crows, or any animal of prey.

During the present severe frost, I am much amused with the long-tail ducks, who at every flow of the tide swim into the bay, and often some way up the river, uttering their most musical and singular cry, which at a distance resembles the bugle-like note of the wild swan more than anything else.

As long as there is no collection of floating ice, the bay is very full of birds, and the shores are enlivened with the

large flock of oyster-catchers, redshanks, and an infinite variety of other waders. The redshank begins now to utter the peculiar whistle which indicates the return of spring: early as it is, too, the jack-snipes, red-wings, fieldfares, &c., seem to return northwards, as I see great numbers of these and other birds, which had for the last month or two disappeared, having, probably, then gone southwards.

The little water-rail seems to be a great wanderer. I find its track, and the bird itself, in the most unlikely places; for instance, I put one up in a dry furze field, and my retriever caught another in a hedge, at some distance from the water: I took the latter bird home alive to show to my children. When I took him out of my pocket, in which most unaccustomed situation he had been for two hours, this strange little creature looked about him with the greatest nonchalance possible, showing fight at everything that came near him; and when, having gratified the curiosity of the children, we turned him loose in a ditch of running water, he went away jerking up his tail, and not seeming to hurry himself, or to be in the least disconcerted.

In hard frosts during this month I get a great number of wild ducks by waiting for an hour (the last hour of light) near some open place in the lochs, or streams, where they come to feed. On my way home from shooting, when I have been in the direction of the swamps, I often do this, and generally succeed in filling my bag with mallards and widgeon.

Just before sunset I take up my position in the midst of two or three furze bushes, within easy shot of where a small stream runs into one of the lakes, keeping the water constantly open. Having given my retriever the biscuit which I always carry for him on these cold days, I light my pipe (the great comfort of the patient wild-fowl shooter), and look out towards the bay for the mallards. The bay is nearly half a mile off, but I can see the ducks between me and the sky almost as soon as they leave it. At first a solitary pair or two come, quietly and swiftly, probably making their way to some favourite spring farther inland. However, with the help of a cartridge, I bring down a brace from a great height as they pass over; sometimes tumbling on the ice of the loch behind me, they are nearly split in two; sometimes, when winged, they fall in the rushy stream, and give the retriever no small trouble and cold before he gets them; however, he

always succeeds, and having brought the bird, and received his reward of ship-biscuit, he lies down again, but with eyes and ears all intent on what is going on. The sea-gull, or heron, may pass, and he takes no notice of them; but the moment that a wild duck's quack, or the whistle of his wings, is heard, the dog's ears erect themselves, and he watches my face with a look of most inquiring eagerness. I hear the wild swans "trumpeting" on the sea, but know that they are not very likely to come where I am placed. Presently, however, a brace of teal pitch suddenly, and unexpectedly, within a few yards of me, having flitted in from behind.

I kill the drake, but cannot get a shot at the duck, as she flies low, and the smoke hanging heavily in the calm evening, prevents my seeing her. However, all at once the mallards begin to fly from the sea, and for half an hour or less I have to load and fire as fast as I can, as they fly over. I prefer shooting them on the wing, for if I let them pitch in the water, my dog has a swim every time I kill one, and gets half-dead with ice and frozen snow.

The mallards generally fly in from the sea rapidly, and at no great height; but it requires some practice to kill them, as their flight is much quicker than it appears, and they require a hard blow to kill them dead. If wounded only, they fly off, and dropping at some distance, I can seldom get them that night, owing to the approaching darkness. Sometimes my retriever marks the direction of a wounded duck and gets it, but generally they are lost, and serve only to feed the foxes, who seem to hunt for maimed birds regularly round the lakes.

Having killed ten mallards and a teal, it becomes too dark to shoot any more, although I still hear their wings as they fly over my head. Besides which, I have nearly three miles to walk; and my keeper, who has also killed two or three, had, before we commenced duck shooting, sundry animals to carry, the produce of my day's wanderings. We have to walk home too, there being no road near these lakes. So, after I have re-filled my pipe, and the old fellow has re-charged his nose with a spoonful of snuff, we shoulder our game and set off. Eight or ten fat mallards, too, are no slight load over a rough track in the dark, so we keep the sands as far as possible, listening to the different cries of the sandpipers, curlews, and numerous kinds of wild fowl who feed on the

shallows and sandbanks during the night time. Occasionally in the moonlight we catch a glimpse of the mallards as they rise from some little stream or ditch which runs into the bay, or we see a rabbit hurrying up at our approach, from the seaweed, which he had been nibbling.

In this way, with very little trouble, and often much nearer home, I can generally reckon on getting some few brace of wild ducks in the winter; shifting my place of ambush according to the weather, the wind, &c., changes in which cause the birds to take to different feeding-places.

Trout are not nearly so tender a fish as is generally supposed. At the farm-yard here they have two trout, about six inches or more in length, living in the wooden trough out of which the cart horses drink. They were caught in the river in August, and throughout all the severe frost have lived, and apparently continued in good condition, although sometimes in passing I have seen the water in the trough so firmly frozen, and the ice apparently reaching so low, that the trout had scarcely room to swim. When fresh water is put in they always come to the place where it is poured, and seem to look for any particles of food or any insects that may come in with it. They feed on worms which the boys often bring them, and which they take immediately, without fear. The change of colour in fish is very remarkable, and takes place with great rapidity. Put a living *black* burn trout into a *white* basin of water, and it becomes, within half an hour,* of a light colour. Keep the fish living in a white jar for some days, and it becomes absolutely white; but put it into a dark-coloured or black vessel, and although on first being placed there the white-coloured fish shows most conspicuously on the black-ground, in a quarter of an hour it becomes as dark-coloured as the bottom of the jar, and consequently difficult to be seen. No doubt this facility of adapting its colour to the bottom of the water in which it lives, is of the greatest service to the fish in protecting it from its numerous enemies. All anglers must have observed that in every stream the trout are very much of the same colour as the gravel or sand on which they live: whether this change of colour is a voluntary or involuntary act on the part of the fish I leave it for the scientific to determine.

* In the case of some fish the change is perceptible in five minutes.

CHAPTER XIII.

FEBRUARY.

Change of Colour in Stoats—Affection of Otters for their Young—Roe-hunting—Attachment of Birds to their Mates—Food of Fieldfares during Snow—Widgeon—Wildfowl Shooting at Spynie—Incidents in Shooting—Winged Swau—Cats—Food of Wild Geese—Brent Goose.

February 2nd.—FEBRUARY is always with us the most snowy month of the year. I find that, in my journal for the first week of this month, during several years, it is generally marked down that the country is clothed in snow. The quantity of floating snow and ice which comes down the river fills the bay, and sends the wild-fowl to some less dreary part of the country. Occasionally a golden eye or long-tailed duck pitches in some clear spot of the river, but is almost immediately driven out again by the floating ice. In some places the course of the river is quite altered, being choked up by the accumulation of ice on the shallows, and the water takes some new run. What becomes of the fish during this kind of weather?

The rooks dig deep into the snow, and plough up the young wheat in great quantities with their strong bills. The stoats are now pure white in almost every instance, although I shot one on the 3rd of this month who had only very partially acquired his winter colour. My rabbit beagles ran him for a long time full cry on some rough ground. Whenever the stoat went into a rabbit-hole I turned him out again with a ferret, in this way running him till I killed him.

While the river is in this state of confusion with ice, &c., I see that the otters take themselves to the unfrozen ditches and springs to hunt for eels and flounders, which fish they feed on apparently with great perseverance, if one can judge by the distance they hunt for them in the snow. The otter, judging from the ground he goes over, must commence moving as soon as it is dark, and continue his hunting till nearly daylight.

Notwithstanding the shyness of the otter, this animal is very determined in the defence of its young ones, and boldly confronts a person who takes one of them up. My keeper tells me that he has seen an old otter feeding her young with fish: the two young ones were sitting on a flat stone at the edge of the burn when their parent brought them a good-sized trout. They immediately both seized the fish, pulling

and tearing at it like two bull-dog puppies. At last they came to a pitched battle with each other, biting, squealing, and tugging, and leaving the trout to its fate. On this the old one interfered, and making them quiet, gave the trout to one of them as his own. The other young one, on seeing the parent do this, no longer interfered, but sat quietly looking on, till the old otter (who in the meantime had renewed her fishing) came back with a large trout for it also.

When she brings a fish to the shore for her young ones, she calls them by a kind of loud whistling cry. Altogether this is a most interesting animal, graceful in its movements, and in salmon rivers not nearly so destructive and injurious as he is supposed to be, feeding on eels, flounders, and trout far more than on salmon: in such situations he is most unjustly persecuted.

The roe now are in perfect condition, and I find the snow does not in the least spoil the scent in hunting them with beagles. It is a very amusing kind of shooting where the woods are sufficiently broken and interspersed with open ground, so as to enable one to see both roe and hounds pretty often. In drawing the large woods I am often annoyed by the hounds going off after a fox, who generally leads them straight away for several miles, tires the little beagles, and finally escapes into his earth without getting shot: but occasionally he pays for his depredations, notwithstanding his cunning.

Soon after throwing off in one of the large covers near the sea, the hounds begin to find the cold scent of roe, and gradually working up to the thickets, often start the animal in view. Away they then go, making the woods echo again with their deep tones, the younger dogs taking the lead. The roe at first tries to avoid leaving the first division of wood in which he is found, but on the hounds sticking to him, he crosses some wide, open heather and swamp to the higher grounds. Here the trees are older, with little underwood; so after a rattling run through all this, I can reckon on their crossing the swamps again to the thickets, where the buck was first found. He comes to the head of the brae and stands listening to the hounds, carefully examining the wide flats of heath, wood, and swamp below him. The hounds come nearer and nearer, and still the buck seems unwilling to cross the open ground. At last the dogs are close to him, and then only he descends the bank, springing over the

juniper, which is frequently six feet high, the staunch little pack threading their way through it. Across they go, and over the swamps, the buck springing from hillock to hillock wherever he can find footing. The beagles make their way wonderfully, often in view, but as often tumbling into the holes of water which they sometimes can scarcely get out of; however, I am generally at hand to help them, and once again on terra firma, off they go headed by old "Durwood," who begins now to think of killing. Straight through the thicket where we first found, across a wide tract of smaller and more open wood they run without a moment's check, startling the blackcocks, who, rising as the hounds pass, perch on the summits of the fir-trees, looking down with wonder at what is going on. Away goes the roe, not fifty yards ahead of his persevering little followers, and they are now all in a wide tract of fir-wood, with the rankest heather in it that I ever saw: straight through this they go to the very sea-shore, putting up the curlews as they skirt the sands. But it is of no use; the beagles become more eager every moment, and after half an hour's hard running round this tract near the shore, the buck seems suddenly to change his mind, and turns directly inland again, at a sharp angle to his course. A short, but very short check ensues; the hounds are soon in full cry again, and after pressing him hard through the cover, he is driven to some sandy hillocks in the midst of the wilderness—and here comes the trial of the hounds. Up and down, and round and round every one of these does the roe go at a foot's pace, but managing to keep always out of view; by this he recovers wind; and, going slowly over the dry sand, leaves as little scent as possible.

It won't do, however: the beagles, headed by the old dog, stick to his track, and wind in and out the hillocks after him, keeping the scent in a manner that is quite incredible. Away goes the buck again to try a new scheme. He suddenly dashes across a wide opening and gets to some high close furze: through this he winds his way, followed, however, by the relentless hounds, who, regardless of rabbits, &c., stick to his scent, although it is getting colder and colder. The evening is coming on, and the frost is becoming severer. The rabbits, too, help to put the dogs out. But the roe is viewed as he passes out of the furze, and we run him over some high hillocks which have great clumps of furze on them. Here

again we suddenly come to a check; but, after searching some time in vain for his track or scent, I unexpectedly find his footmark in a deep dry drain which divides the pasturage from the wooded wilderness. There is no mistaking it. So I call the dogs, who, tired and stiff as they are, come joyfully to the holloa. At first they only sniff in an uncertain manner up the drain; but at last the youngest hound gives tongue at a spot where some grass or heather had retained the scent longer than elsewhere, and they are all soon again in full cry. I still keep with the hounds to help and encourage them, when presently I hear a shot, and rightly guess that my friend, whom I had left shivering long ago in a pass, had killed the roe. He turned out to be a fine buck; so after paunching him, and rewarding the dogs with blood and liver, &c., &c., which they wait patiently for, not attempting to tear the animal itself, we get it conveyed to the place where I had left my car.

Passing through a wood on our way, the old hound, who was not coupled, suddenly threw up his nose, and before I could prevent him was off in full cry into the cover. I managed to stop the rest of the dogs, not wishing them to have any more running, as they were all tired out, and went alone to get back Durwood. From his tone I soon knew that it was a fox he was after, as when hunting this animal his cry was always different from what it was when on the scent of a roe. I found it of no use going through the cover; so I waited in the wide road towards which he seemed coming. Presently, quick as lightning, and without the slightest noise, a very large dog-fox sprang into the road. He snuffed the air right and left with an eager look, but seemed not to observe me, for I was standing quite still close to the trunk of a birch tree. He then listened to the hound; and finding that he was going eastward, the fox came trotting up the road directly towards me. When within about eighty yards he suddenly stopped, and seemed to suspect my presence. I had had my gun up to my shoulder for some time; and the moment he stopped I pulled the trigger, trusting to a B. B. cartridge, notwithstanding the distance. He immediately began tumbling about, dancing on his head, and springing into the air. I ran up to give him the contents of the other barrel, which was loaded with small shot, but he had disappeared; however, with the help of the hound, who had now come up, I found him within twenty yards of the road.

He was shot in the chest, and was in the very act of giving up the ghost when we came to him. In this country all ways of killing foxes are considered fair, as hunting is out of the question; and if they are not kept down they destroy every kind of game, lambs, and poultry.

Feb. 8.—I shot a female pochard to-day, one out of a large flock: the rest, of course, all flew away. But presently a male bird, probably the mate of the one I had killed, came flying back from the lake to which the flock had gone, and after passing once or twice low over the place where I had shot her, he pitched on the water and swam about, searching eagerly for his lost companion. He then went off to the flock again; but soon returned a second time to look for the hen. Three times did he go and return in the same manner, till at last he seemed to give it up as hopeless.

I have observed the same attachment to their mates in common wild ducks, teal, swans, &c., as well as in many other birds. I remember an instance of a hen grouse being caught by the leg in a common vermin trap which had been set for ravens. It happened that the trap was not looked at till late the following day, when we found that the cock grouse had brought and laid close to his unfortunate mate a quantity of young heather shoots: they were enough to have nearly filled a hat, and the poor bird must have been employed many hours in collecting them. I cannot express how grieved I was at the hen having been caught.

Great numbers of fieldfares come down during the snowy weather to the fields to feed on the turnips. They dig holes into the roots to an extent that astonished me. I shot two or three. They are very fat; but smell and taste so strongly of turnips that they are quite uneatable.

The widgeons leave the bay, which is nearly covered with ice, and feed on the clover fields, digging under the snow with their bills to get at the herbage. I never saw them do so before in this county; indeed it is very seldom that the snow in Morayshire remains long enough on the ground, at least in the district near the sea, to annoy the wild fowl to any extent.

While the snow is soft and newly fallen, the rabbits seldom go fifty yards from their seat of the day before, and constantly return to the same bush.

About the middle of this month I was shooting, with Captain Cumming, at the loch of Spynie, which I consider to

be about the best loch in the North for wild-fowl shooting. Its situation is excellent; and being for the most part shallow, and covered with grass, rushes, and tall reeds, it is perfectly adapted in every way for sheltering and breeding all sorts of wild-fowl; they resort there in incredible numbers, and of every kind, from the swan to the teal. When, in the evening, we took up position near the old potatoe fields, we generally killed several mallards, as they feed constantly on these roots.

The widgeon in this loch are remarkably fine, and seem to come early into good plumage. There would appear to be a great proportion of drakes in the flocks of these birds, as out of ten widgeon killed there was only one duck. The flight of the widgeon in the evening, as they leave the deeper parts of the lake for the grassy margin, is very amusing. When they first rise, and before we can see them, we hear their peculiar whistle; and they almost immediately appear flying in small companies with great swiftness to their destination. This whistling sound, which they utter during their flight, is quite different from their cry while swimming and playing on the water. It requires a very quick eye and a good retriever to bag many birds in this twilight shooting; but Captain Cumming, alone, killed fourteen mallards and a widgeon one evening while I was there. This was excellent work, considering that it was only for a short time during the dusk that he could shoot, that they were all single shots, and that every bird had to be retrieved out of water overgrown with rushes, &c. The widgeon have already begun to fly in pairs.

In the middle of February the peewits begin to appear here. The exact day depends chiefly on the state of the weather: the first break up of the snow and ice generally brings them. About the same time I hear the coo of the wood-pigeons, who now come near the house for protection. This they do every year as the breeding season approaches.

Three otters are frequenting the mouth of the river, apparently fishing for the flounders left in the pools near the sea. The keeper is pretty sure of catching them by putting traps at the places where they leave the water on their way up the stream after fishing. Whilst going *down* the otter seldom leaves the water at all; but uninterruptingly fishes his way to the sea: coming up, he takes the land at all the rapids and strong streams. Two rather singular and yet

similar things happened to me one day whilst I was wild-fowl shooting. I shot at a mallard, a considerable distance from me, and evidently struck him, as after flying some distance to the windward he pitched in a grass field: but on my approach he rose again and went at a great height down wind towards the sea. I happened to keep my glass on him, and when he was about a quarter of a mile off I saw him turn over in the air and fall. On coming up to the place I found the bird quite alive, but with his wing broken close to the body. The shot must have struck the bone without breaking it. The singular part of the affair was that the bird could battle against strong wind for at least a quarter of a mile without the injured bone giving way. In the evening we went to wait at a pool for ducks. Just as it got dark a rushing noise was heard, and a pair of swans skimmed rapidly over the old keeper's head, and pitched in the water, making a monstrous wave. They did not see us, and immediately began to feed. It was getting dark, and the old man, not wishing to lose a chance, got up from his hiding place and ran quickly to the water's edge, firing both barrels at the largest bird as it flew away. His gun was only loaded with No. 3, and the distance, as we afterwards found, was above forty yards. Both the swans flew on for some distance, until we suddenly saw the wing of one give way, and down came the bird into the pool, which was of considerable size, although shallow. I had left my retriever at home to rest, and before I could stop him, in went the old man, and then began a chase which I have seldom seen equalled. Although the water was shallow, the bottom was uneven; and every minute down went Donald head foremost. I called to him to let me shoot the bird, and leave it to drift to the shore; but all in vain. On he went, tumbling over and over, and the swan swimming and struggling in the water close to him, making an immense splashing and noise. They got quite away from me; and I had nothing left but to sit down and watch the chase as well as I could through the approaching darkness. At last he hemmed the bird into a rushy corner of the loch, and caught her. But this was no sooner done, than the swan, by her flapping and struggling, tripped him up, and got away again, leaving her antagonist flat in the water. Then, and not till then, he began to load his gun, which he had to my great wonderment contrived to carry all the time high over his head; but, of course, notwithstanding all his care, it had got quite wet and

would not go off, and the conflict ended at last by a lucky blow from the barrels which stunned the swan. I was amused at the boyish eagerness of so old a stager; particularly as we never lost a shot at ducks or anything else without his laying it to my fault. I "*had lifted my head too high*," or done something else showing my want of tact. The poor fellow was in a sad plight, being ducked to the skin all over with half frozen water. However, I made him walk quickly home, and he got no damage from his exploit. The swan weighed 18 lbs., and measured above seven feet from tip to tip. We found that many shots had struck the wing feathers without breaking them.

Towards the end of February, whenever the ground is soft, the badgers leave their holes, and wander far and near, digging up the ground like pigs, in the fields as well as in the woods.

The wild cats are brindled grey, and I have observed that domestic cats of the same colour are more inclined to take to the woods and hunt for themselves than any others. When they do so they invariably grow very large, and are most destructive to game of all kinds. A large cat of this colour found out some tame rabbits belonging to my boys, and killed several of them. At last we saw him come out of a hole where some white rabbits were breeding; and he was shot. The brute had evidently been living on them for some time.

At this season the bean goose and the pink-footed goose feed very much on a coarse red-coloured grass which grows in the peat mosses. They pull it up and eat the root, which is somewhat bulbous shaped. While feeding on it they become very heavy and fat, and have no strong or disagreeable flavour.

Though these two kinds of geese both feed and fly together, still while on the wing and while on the ground they keep somewhat apart. The bean geese are far the most numerous; but there is generally a small company of the pink-footed kind with them, and no one but a close observer would perceive that they do not associate as closely as if they all belonged to one family.

A wounded brent goose, which I brought home, very soon became tame, and fed fearlessly close to us; indeed, I have frequently observed the same inclination to tameness in this beautiful kind of goose.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARCH.

Wild Swans—Loch of Spynie; Wild Fowl on it—Pochard—Carrion Crows—
Death of Wild Swan—Domestication of Wild Fowl; flavour of—Arrival
of Geese.

EVERY day now shows the approach of spring. The mallards are in pairs in all the pools near the lakes, taking to the larger sheets of water only during the daytime. My boys catch plenty of sea trout in the river; these fish rise better in the month of March than at any other time. I have seen for some time six wild swans on one of the lakes; they appear to be of two different kinds, three of them being much larger than the others. The larger birds, too, are much more wary and wild than the smaller; at the head of them all is the largest swan I ever saw.

The swans frequent one particular lake, seldom alighting on any other piece of water. This lake is peculiarly open, and very difficult of approach, which is doubtless one reason for their fixing on it; another is, that in many places it is so shallow that they can reach with their long necks the grassy plants growing at the bottom, on the roots of which plants they feed. Whenever I go that way there are these swans surrounded by numbers of ducks, widgeon, teal, &c., who are feeding with them and looking out for the scraps and remnants of the plants which they pull up.

Day by day, at the beginning of March, the brent geese seem to increase in numbers: they feed on the grassy banks on the shores of the neck of land called the "Bar."

I drove over to Gordonston to shoot ducks on Spynie. Although the lochs were crowded with birds, the day was too fine and calm to enable me to kill many. However, I managed to shoot a few mallards and teal by rowing along and quietly in and out the tall reeds which grow in patches on the lake. The teal are now very lively, flying constantly in small companies and keeping up a perpetual whistling. The coots are always conspicuous amongst the other wild fowl, swimming high in the water and moving quickly about. On the islands I found several otter seats in the rushes, where they appear to make forms like hares.

The keeper caught a beautiful male pochard which had been wounded somewhere in the body, but apparently was not much hurt, although disabled from flying. I took it

home with me alive, and turned it into a small enclosure, where it amused us much by its tameness and confidence, beginning to eat worms and porridge immediately, and seeming to enjoy itself in this new situation as much as if it had been always accustomed to it.

There are no enemies so destructive to the wild fowl as the carrion or rather the hooded crow, which is the kind we have here. Eggs and young birds all come alike to these robbers, but the keeper at Spynie manages to kill great numbers of them by poison; he uses strychnia, a very small quantity of which kills the crow on the spot.

The badgers hunt more and more every day at this season if the weather is open, and apparently they wander several miles from their home.

On the 2nd of March I see the rooks building. There is much snow on the mountains, but the low country is quite clear.

The principal wild fowl on Loch Spynie, Loch Lee, &c., just now, are mallards, sheldrakes, widgeons, teals, pintails, scaup ducks, pochards, golden eyes, a few swans, bald coots and waterhens, besides an infinity of gulls, redshanks, plovers, peewits, curlews, &c. They all keep up a constant calling and noise, in the morning and evening particularly. All the ducks, though collected in flocks, still keep in pairs, so that when a large flock is on wing, it seems to consist wholly of different pairs of birds.

I have tried two or three days to get at the largest wild swan on Loch Lee, but without success; my fruitless attempts I do not mark down—*Horas non numero nisi serenas*. However, on the 6th, a fine sunny day, as I passed at some distance from the lake where the swans were feeding, they rose and alighted on the largest of the pieces of water; seeing this, and that they were not inclined to take to the sea immediately, I sent the boy who was with me round the lake where they were, while I made my preparations for receiving them at their feeding lake, supposing that they would return to it if allowed to rest for an hour or so and then quietly moved; even if they did not alight, I knew that I was pretty sure of their line of flight to the sea, and they seldom flew very high. I waded across part of the loch to an island, where I determined to await them, and set to work to make up a hiding-place of long heather, &c. This done, I loaded my gun with large shot and cartridges, and established my-

self behind my barricade. With my glass I saw the boy and retriever go round towards them; the appearance of the swans floating quietly on the water was most picturesque, their white forms being clearly defined on the dark blue water, and their shadows almost as distinct as themselves. They all held their heads erect, watching the boy, who, as he had been instructed, walked to and fro opposite the birds and sufficiently near to put them up, but without appearing to be in pursuit of them. I hoped by this means to drive them over to the loch where I was concealed without frightening them so much as to make them take off to the sea; but they seemed so unwilling to rise, and so little afraid of the boy, whom they appeared to look at with curiosity rather than alarm, that I struck a light in order to smoke the pipe of patience and resignation, for, fine as the day was for March, my situation in a damp island and wet through above my knees began to be uncomfortable.

The latakia was not half puffed away when I heard the well-known warning cry of the swans, and immediately looking round saw them just flapping along the water preparatory to their flight. Cocking my gun, and holding the pipe tighter in my teeth, I waited anxiously to see in what direction they would fly. At first they made straight eastward, as if off for the bay of Findhorn, but after a short flight in that direction they turned, and I saw them coming three and three together, as usual, straight towards where I was concealed. In a few minutes they were exactly over my head, at a good height, but still within shot, flying with their long necks stretched straight out and their black feet tucked up, but plainly visible as they passed over me. I stood up and took a deliberate aim at the largest of them as he ascended higher into the air at my unexpected appearance. The first barrel seemed to have little effect on him, though I distinctly heard the shot rattle on his strong quills; the second, however, which was loaded with larger shot, was more effective: whilst his two companions continued crying to each other, he remained silent. However, he kept up with the rest, and they all went off towards the bay. In the meantime three smaller swans came within twenty yards of me or less, trumpeting and calling loudly.

With the glass I watched the bird I had fired at, as I knew he was hard hit. He still, however, held his way with the rest, and they were gradually getting indistinct when I

suddenly saw him rise straight up into the air, his snowy plumage shining as it caught the rays of the sun. I saw him a second time rise perpendicularly to a great height; he then suddenly turned backwards in the air and tumbled headlong to the ground perfectly dead. He was above half a mile or more from me, in the direction of the bay, and the whole intervening ground was covered with sand-hills and bent, so that I could not see the exact spot where he fell, whether on the dry ground or in the sea. However, I marked the direction as well as I could, and set off after him.

Large as he was, I had a long and for some time a fruitless search amongst the broken sand-hills. I scanned the bay with the glass in vain; and then came back towards the lochs. At last I hit upon him by finding a quantity of blood on the sand, and following the drops, which had fallen almost in a stream: in fact the track of blood, though falling from such a height, was as conspicuous as that of a wounded hare on snow. At length I came to the swan, who was lying stretched out on the sand, and a noble bird he was. I shouldered him as well as his great length would enable me to do, and carried him back to where the boy was waiting for me. I found him, too, no slight burden; he weighed above 27 lbs.; the breadth between his wings 8 feet, and his length 5 feet. Of all the swans I ever killed he was by far the largest, the usual weight being from 15 to 18 lbs.

The pochard which I brought home from Spynie remains quite contented and goes about with the other ducks. He will eat whatever they feed upon, but prefers worms to everything else, showing great activity in diving for them when they are flung into the water. If they are given to him on land, he usually carries each worm to the water before eating it. Even when brought into the house he seems quite at home. Many kinds of wild fowl might, with a little care, be perfectly domesticated, and I have no doubt would breed freely. Care must, however, be taken to prevent their flying away at the migrating seasons, and also to keep them at home when they begin to make their nests, as at that time they seem inclined to wander off in search of quiet and undisturbed places. I have no doubt that the sheldrake might be tamed in this way, and after a few generations of them had been bred at home, that these birds would become as useful for the table as our common ducks, and would be far more ornamental.

After two or three generations of any bird have been domesticated the young ones lose all their wild inclinations, tameness becoming hereditary with them, as skill and the power of benefiting by education become hereditary in dogs to a very striking degree.

Though the flesh of the wild sheldrake is quite unfit to eat, being excessively rank and fishy, the birds, if domesticated and fed on proper food, would soon lose this strong flavour. The common mallard, though so excellent a bird when feeding in the stubble fields, is often rank and bad when driven by deep snows and frost to feed on seaweed, shellfish, &c. Widgeon and brent geese also, and in fact all wild fowl, are good or bad eating according to where they feed, in the same way that the dog of the Chinese, which is fattened for the table, must be very unlike in flavour to a foxhound who has been fed on horseflesh.

The bernacle goose seldom pays us a visit, but I saw a few one day near the bar. I had one of my boys with me, who was anxious to get a shot at a wild swan which was swimming about one of the lochs, and when we came back from an unsuccessful pursuit of him the geese had left the place. This bird is numerous only on the west coast.

About the 20th of March I saw a few white-fronted geese feeding in the swamps near the lakes.

On the 22nd the dabchicks come to their breeding places in the smaller lochs, where there are plenty of rushes, and the sheldrakes now come frequently inland. About the middle of March the black-backed gulls are very noisy in the bay.

As the old keeper saw some bean geese pass over the house, I took a long walk on the 12th to look for them in their usual feeding-places, but without success. The old man, a true "laudator temporis acti," complains that the whole country is spoilt by "drainings and improvements," which banish the wild fowl from their former haunts.

When the frogs begin to croak in the pools and ditches the mallards are sure to be found in these places every evening and morning.

23rd.—*Nunc avis in ramo tecta laremque parat.* The wood-pigeons are building in the shrubberies close to the window.

How beautifully the different birds are constructed for their different modes of feeding! The tender nerves at the end of the bills of the woodcock, snipe, and curlew enable

them to find their food under ground as correctly as if it were within full view. The oyster-catcher can detach from the rock and break up mussels and other shellfish. The oyster-catcher, by the bye, can have little to do with oysters except in name, for strong as he is, he could scarcely manage to find his living if condemned to feed on oysters alone. The bill of the merganser and other birds of that kind is perfectly adapted, by means of its curved teeth, to hold their slippery prey, while the inward sloping plates in the wild duck's bill are equally suited for retaining the small worms, &c., on which they feed. The carrion-feeding ravens and other birds of that class have a most perfect and powerful weapon in their strong and sharp bills. The crossbill, too, shears off the fir-cones and extracts the seeds with his clumsy-looking bill with a facility that no other shaped tool would afford him. In short, go through the list of all birds, and you will find that each one is perfectly adapted in form and powers for procuring its peculiar food.

Whilst talking of the food of birds I cannot help adverting to the absurd idea of woodcocks and snipes living "by suction," which you see gravely affirmed as a fact; whereas a snipe or woodcock is as great an eater as any bird I know. Anyone who has kept either of these birds in confinement well knows what difficulty he has had in supplying them with sufficient worms to satisfy their ravenous appetite. My friend, Mr. Hancock, tells me that he has succeeded in keeping many kinds of sandpipers, and even the common snipe, alive and in good health by feeding them principally on boiled liver minced small, which seems to approximate more closely to the usual food of insectivorous and worm-eating birds than any other substance.

It is amusing to see the arrival of the larger flocks of geese about this time of year. A few small companies of pink-footed and white-fronted geese usually arrive early in the month, but about the 28th, and generally on some quiet evening, immense flights of the bean goose arrive in the Findhorn Bay. They come in, just about sunset, in four or five large flocks, and an infinite quantity of gabbling and chattering takes place for several hours; but by daybreak they seem to have determined on their respective beats, and separating into smaller flocks disperse over the land, and do not collect again in very numerous flocks until they are about to leave that part of the country at the end of April or the beginning

of May. The wild geese decrease in number every year; the grey lag goose is a very rare visitor to the oat-fields here, although so many breed in Sutherlandshire.

The woodcocks are more numerous at this time of year in the larger woods than during any part of the winter: they pair early, and have probably before this time taken up their breeding quarters. Those which breed abroad do not leave this country till just before their time of laying. I am much inclined to think that most birds which migrate from us in the spring pair some time before they take their departure.

CHAPTER XV.

APRIL.

Field Mice—Brent Geese—Arrival of Migratory Birds—Instinct of Crows in Feeding—Instinct of Thrushes—Disappointments in Shooting Wild Geese—Death of White-fronted Geese—Shetland Pony—Heronry—Anecdote of Roebuck—Wild Duck's Nest.

THE wild geese which came a few days ago have now entirely disappeared, either in consequence of finding no oats sown, or from some impending change of weather on the higher grounds.

The field-mice on the approach of cold and wet shut up the mouths of their holes. There are a great many of these little animals in some of the fields near the house, notwithstanding the quantity killed by the owls, who come down from the large woods every night, and hunt in the cultivated grounds.

Immense numbers of brent geese float with every tide into the bays formed by the bar. As the tide recedes they land on the grass and feed in closely-packed flocks. On the land they are light active birds, walking quickly, and with a graceful carriage. On any alarm, before rising, they run together as close as they can; thus affording a good chance to the shooter, who may be concealed near enough, of making his shot tell among their heads and necks. All geese and swans have this habit of crowding together when first alarmed.

April is an interesting month to the ornithologist, as it is then that most of the migratory birds change their quarters, some leaving us, and others arriving. The regularity of their going and coming is very surprising. Unless change

of weather or very severe winds interfere, the arrival and departure of most birds may be calculated nearly to a day.

For the last two years I have first seen the martins on the 25th of April, and the common chimney swallow on the 27th. The terns also come at the same time. Indeed in both years I have seen them on the same day, *i.e.* the 27th. On the 30th the fieldfares still remain, but not in the same numbers as they were a few days ago. On the 28th large flocks both of fieldfares and redwings passed by us on their way to the northward. A few pair of these birds breed, I am told, in the large woods near the Spey. And this year (1848) I was shown a nest and eggs, brought from that district by a brother of Mr. Dunbar. He described it as having been placed near the ground.

Mr. Hancock tells me that in Norway, where he has seen them breeding, the fieldfares make their nests in very large companies, a great many being placed on each tree, and for the most part at a considerable height from the ground.

The last jack-snipe that I killed this year was on the 18th of April. Indeed I do not remember ever killing one after that time. I shot a greenshank on the same day. The latter bird breeds commonly in Sutherlandshire. But I have never ascertained that the jack-snipe's nest was seen, or indeed that the bird is known to breed, in that county. The widgeons began to decrease in numbers. I do not understand the moulting of these birds: for at the very time when they leave us, many of the male birds have not attained their full plumage. Those who frequent the salt water are more backward in this respect than such as feed in the fresh waters; nor are the former ever in such good condition, or so well flavoured, as the latter.

There are very large flocks of the oyster-catcher, the curlew, and the knot on the sand banks, &c. Whenever these birds want to alight on any spot, if the wind is at all high they invariably pitch with their heads straight to windward; if they come down the wind to their resting-place, they first fly past it, and then turning back against the wind, alight with their heads in that direction.

At this season salmon and trout frequent those parts of the river where the stream is the slowest, or lie in dead water, apparently not having the strength, which, in the warm weather, enables them to lie perfectly at their ease in the strongest rapid.

Amongst the curious instincts which birds display in providing themselves with food, one most resembling reason is that which teaches the common crow, on finding on the shore a shell containing fish, to fly with it to a height in the air, and then to let it drop in order to break the shell sufficiently to get at the fish enclosed in it. When the shell does not break the first time that the crow drops it, she darts down, picks it up, and ascends still higher, till she perceives that the height is sufficient for her purpose. Sometimes another crow darts in to carry off the booty; upon which a battle ensues in the air. Cunning as the crow is, she seldom finds any prize without letting all the neighbourhood know of it by her cries and gestures. With perfect truth the ancient poet said—

“Tacitus pasci, si posset corvus, haberet
Plus dapis, et rixæ multo minus invidiæque.”

The crows collect great numbers of sea-shells on particular favourite hillocks, which are often some distance from the sea. I have frequently observed in this country great collections of this kind, and from the state of the shells it would appear that they bring them to the same place for many successive years.

In some of the woods the thrushes and blackbirds carry the land-shells to certain fixed stones against which they break them, in order to get at the snails. In a wood of “Brodie,” where the round yellow and black-striped shell (*Helix nemoralis*) is abundant, owing, I conclude, to the rocks under the surface being limestone, I watched two thrushes bring several of these shells in a very short space of time; they knocked them against the stone, and if that did not do, they stuck the shell in a crevice and hammered away at it until they extracted the snail, with which they then flew away, probably to feed their young. Whenever I passed through the wood I always visited the thrushes’ stone, and found an increasing heap of broken shells. Most birds, if carefully watched, would be found to have recourse to various most surprising expedients in order to obtain food for themselves and their young.

In this country April is the best month for the bean-geese, yet many weary and often fruitless miles I have walked in pursuit of them. There is something in the wildness and wariness of this fine bird that makes it a peculiarly attractive object of pursuit; but wild goose shooting is

“Omnium rerum incertissima.”

When I have concealed myself in one of my hiding-places in a newly-sown field of oats or peas, the geese, after keeping me perhaps a long time waiting, may arrive at last; and alighting on the field, may commence feeding without any suspicion of danger till they come nearly within shot. But although concealed from the geese, I may be visible in a different direction, when a couple of villainous large black-backed gulls—as happened to-day—came by, and seeing me lying in wait in a suspicious manner, immediately commenced screaming and wheeling over my head. The geese, who are all dispersed in the field, no sooner hear the gulls than they run rapidly together away from me, for they know by the direction in which the gulls are looking where the danger is; they then rise and betake themselves straight to the sea, leaving me without the chance of a shot, after all the trouble I have had in preparing an ambushade.

One day this month, too, after endeavouring for some time to approach unseen some white-fronted geese, one of which I was very anxious to procure for a friend, I saw the birds go to a pool where I knew I could get within shot of them without the least trouble. So making a considerable circuit, I arrived at a part of the ground from which my approaching the geese was perfectly easy. But just then some peewits saw me as I was advancing in a crouching attitude up to the birds. Had I been walking upright, these peewits would not have taken any notice of me; but the moment that they saw me stooping to conceal myself, they attacked me with screams and cries of alarm sufficient to warn all the country. The geese of course took wing, and left me to return as I came.

To stalk a flock of wild geese when feeding is as difficult, if not more so, as to stalk a stag. From the nature of the ground which they feed on, and their unwearied vigilance, unless you have concealed yourself beforehand within reach of their feeding-place, it is nearly impossible to approach them. Even if some half-dry ditch or drain passes through the field, and is of sufficient depth to hide the sportsman, supposing he has strength enough of back and of resolution to walk in a stooping position up to his knees in cold water for some hundreds of yards, still the birds are most unwilling to approach any such line of ditch, or indeed any other place which can possibly conceal an enemy.

One of my boys, however, succeeded in getting at this same

flock of white-fronted geese in a place where a man could never have done so. He was out for a walk with a gentleman who was staying with me, to whom he was acting as cicerone or guide to the lochs, as I was unable for some reason to go out with him myself. The little boy took the telescope, which their attendant carried, and having looked along the shores of the lakes and through all the likely parts of the ground, which he knew as well as I did, from having frequently ridden that way to join me, he shut up the glass with the exclamation, characteristic of a deerstalker—"There they are!" My friend's question of course was—"Who are there?" And on being told it was a flock of geese, he at once understood why he had been led on from point to point under different excuses: for he had good-naturedly followed passively wherever he was told to go. Having been shown the geese, he sat down with the glass and allowed the child to attempt the task of stalking them, but without having the slightest expectation of his success.

Having watched him for some time till he became invisible, having apparently sunk into the ground amongst the rushes and long grass, his attention was next attracted by seeing the geese suddenly rise, and almost immediately perceiving that one fell to the ground. The next instant he heard the double report of the boy's gun. Another goose left the flock and fell at some distance, but it was unnoticed by him and the servant, as their attention was taken up by the young sportsman, who went dashing through water and swamp to seize the first bird that fell: it was nearly as big as himself, and he brought it up to them in triumph, a successful right and left at wild geese being rather an era in the sporting adventures of a boy ten years old. The well-earned game was then slung across his pony in company with sundry rabbits, &c., and was brought home with no small exultation.

This Shetland pony, than which I never saw a more perfect one, is of great use in many ways. After the hours devoted to Latin, &c., are over, one of the boys, when the weather is tolerable, generally rides out to meet me, if I am in ground which I cannot drive to; and having anchored his pony to a weight sufficient to keep him from wandering far, but not too heavy to prevent his feeding about the rough grass, furze, &c., he joins me, and the pony has all the hares and rabbits slung across his back to save the shoulders of the old keeper. Standing fire perfectly, the little Shetlander seems rather to

enjoy the shooting and to take an interest in what we kill. With proper treatment and due care these Shetland ponies become the most docile and fine-tempered animals in the world; but if once they are badly used they soon become as full of tricks and as vicious as a monkey. The only bad habit of which I could never break ours was opening every gate which hindered his getting out. There was scarcely any common fastening which he would not undo with his teeth, and if he found a weak place in railings he would push against it till he broke it, and then gallop away for an hour or two where he chose. He also had a peculiar knack of finding out and opening the oat-chest in any stable. When out on a marauding excursion of this kind he knew perfectly that he was doing wrong, and would not allow me to catch him, although at home he would follow me anywhere, putting his nose into my hand to ask for apples or bread. At all times, however, he allowed anyone of the children, particularly my little girl, to catch him, and when caught always came back as quietly as possible. There was a great deal of fun and conscious roguery in the little fellow's style of mischief which one could never help laughing at. When idle in his field nothing seemed to please him so much as a game of romps with any dog who would play with him.

When I lived close to Nairn, as soon as ever he heard the horn of the mail-coach, which was blown on its arrival at the inn, he invariably ran to an elevated part of the field, from which he could see over the wall, and waited there for the mail to pass. As soon as it came opposite his station off he set, galloping round and round the field with his heels generally higher than his head, and his long mane and tail streaming out, evidently showing himself off to obtain the applause of the passengers, to whom he seemed to afford daily amusement, as every head was turned back to see him as long as they possibly could.

Riding by the heronry on the Findhorn I saw the keeper at Altyre searching in all the jackdaws' nests that he could reach for the remains of the herons' eggs. These active little marauders live in great numbers in the rocks immediately opposite the herons, and keep up a constant warfare with them during the breeding season, stealing an immense number of their eggs, which they carry over to the holes and crevices of the opposite rocks and eat them, out of reach of the herons. The keeper took handfuls of the shells of the herons' eggs

out of some of the jackdaws' holes: the injury to the heronry from this cause must be very great, as the plundering seems to be incessantly going on.

I see that the peregrine falcon still breeds near the heronry: a pair only remain in the rock, as every season they drive away their young ones to find a resting-place elsewhere. The barn owl also breeds in the rocks of the Findhorn: not having towers or ruins to breed in, they adapt themselves to their situation and take to the rocks.

The male of all hawks, I believe, feeds his mate while she is sitting on her eggs. Whilst I was fishing in the Findhorn, at a place where a great many kestrels breed, one of these birds came flying up the course of the river with a small bird in his claws. When he came opposite the rock where the nest was, he rose in the air and began to call loudly and shrilly for his mate, who soon came out from the rocks, and taking the bird in her talons flew back with it; the male bird, after uttering a few cries expressive of pleasure, flew off to renew his hunting.

The time at which roe lose the velvet from their horns seems to depend on the lateness or earliness of the season. This year (1848) is backward, and as late as the 15th of this month I see that the horns of the bucks are still covered with the velvet. In early seasons their horns are quite clean by the 4th or 5th of the month. When the larch and other trees become green, the roe wander very much, taking to the smaller woods and grassy plantations in search of some favourite foliage or herbage. A fine buck came to an untimely end at Darnaway. Mr. Stuart, on his way to fish, was going along a narrow footpath on the top of the rocks which overhang the river, when his dogs, running into the cover, started a buck, who, taking a sudden spring into the footpath, found himself unexpectedly within a few inches of Mr. Stuart, in fact almost touching him. Without pausing for an instant the frightened animal with another spring went right over the high rocks into the deep black pools of the river below. Mr. Stuart got down to the water and managed to pull the roebuck out, but the poor animal was quite dead, killed by the shock of jumping from so great a height, although his fall must have been much broken by the water.

When a crow leaves her nest on being disturbed, her quiet, sneaking manner of threading her way through the trees tells that she has young or eggs in the thicket as plainly as if she

uttered cries of alarm. These birds are early breeders: I found a hooded crow's nest with eggs nearly hatched on the 16th April.

The common wild duck often builds her nest in a situation from which one would suppose it would be very difficult for the young, when first hatched, to make their way to the water. My retriever put up a wild duck on the 16th in some very high and close heather at some distance from any water. I found that she had her nest in the very centre of the heather and in the densest part of it. The nest was very beautifully formed; it was perfectly round, and looked like a mass of the finest down, with just sufficient coating of small sticks, &c., outside to keep the down together. There were thirteen eggs in it, which we took home and put under a bantam hen: they were hatched in a few days, and I allowed them to go at liberty with their foster mother in the kitchen garden, where they soon became perfectly tame. When the gardener digs any part of the ground, the little fellows immediately flock about his spade, so that it is difficult for him to avoid hurting them, as they tumble about on the newly-turned-up earth, darting at the worms which come into view; whenever they see him take his spade they run after him, as if they thought that his only object in digging up the ground was to find them food. One tiny fellow, who is weaker than the rest, and who consequently gets pushed out of the way by his stronger brethren, waits quietly to be lifted up on the flat of the spade, where the gardener allows him to stop out of the reach of the others, while the little glutton swallows a worm nearly as big as himself. The moment the spade is laid flat on the ground he knows that his turn has come, and running on it, looks out for the expected worm, and is quite fearless although raised on the spade several feet from the ground.

There are few wild birds or other animals which could not be tamed and made useful to us if, instead of constantly persecuting them, we treated them with hospitality and allowed them to live in peace and plenty. All wild fowl are susceptible of domestication, and there are very few kinds which would not breed in a tame state.

Most wild fowl require very little extent of water, as long as they have grass fields to walk about and to feed in. No more water is necessary than is sufficient for them to wash and take an occasional swim in.

Our brent goose seems to eat scarcely anything but grass, and any snails or worms it may find in the field. He is a far more graceful bird on land than the pochard, for quick and active as the latter is in the water, his great flat feet, placed far behind, are of little service to him in walking.

The eye of the pochard is of a most wonderfully clear bright-red colour, something between crimson and scarlet, and is quite unlike that of any other water-fowl that I am acquainted with.

April, if the weather is fine and genial enough to bring out many flies, is about the best month for trout-fishing on the Findhorn. Large river-trout, which are seldom seen at any other time of the year, make their appearance in this month and rise freely; the sea-trout fishing, lower down near the sea, is equally good, the fish being numerous and eager to take the fly.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAY.

Nests of Birds—Cross-bills, &c. --Lateness of Season—Bean-Geese—Partridge's Nest—Northern Diver—Coot's Nest—Teal and her Young—Wren's Nest—Badgers; cunning of; anecdote of—Aurora Borealis; sound made by.

IN this region May is invariably ushered in by the croak of the landrail. Generally this bird is heard on the 1st. If, however, the grass and wheat fields are backward, it is not heard till the 2nd or 3rd, but never later than the 3rd.

On the 1st of May we found in an old crow's nest, placed in a tall Scotch fir-tree, the nest of a horned owl, with one young bird, half grown, and a rotten egg. The owls hoot now very much, and though none breed very near the house I hear them every night in the ash-trees.

The young thrushes, blackbirds, robins, and hedge-sparrows will soon be hatched; but the green-finches, chaffinches, &c., although their nests are nearly completed, have not yet laid any eggs; the insectivorous birds being the first to build.

Swallows, martins, swifts, and wheatears become numerous about the first week in May, and the landrail's call is heard from every patch of clover. The movements of the landrail are very peculiar and amusing: at one moment threading the clover with its head bent to the ground, and looking more like a weasel than a bird; the next, standing perfectly erect, and

uttering its hoarse cry with a voice of brass. I saw one to-day standing upright between the legs of a cow, and crying boldly, as if perfectly aware that the cow was not an enemy.

Whilst fishing in the upper parts of the river I saw numbers of crossbills and siskins in the beautiful woods of Dulsie. The nests of these two birds are scarcely ever found, although they certainly breed plentifully in this country. The siskin conceals its small nest with great care at some distance from the ground, generally near the summit of a spruce fir; while the crossbill places its nest, which it assimilates as much as possible to the colour and texture of the moss, on some good-sized horizontal branch of a fir-tree, so that it is nearly invisible from below.

When the season is late the fish are also late in taking the fly. The natural fly does not come to maturity this year as early as usual, in consequence of the herbage not having come up; and the want of flies on the water keeps the fish from coming out to the streams and pools of the river, where the angler expects them.

There is much snow on the Monaghleahd mountains this year (1847); and in consequence of this melting gradually from the heat of the noonday sun, the water rises at a certain hour daily; here, at Dulsie, the rise takes place about three or four in the morning. Having risen for an hour or two, it again falls to its usual level.

May 6.—The salmon-fry begin to appear.

May 7.—I observe a flock of bean geese in the bay, probably the last I shall see this year, as it is time for them to be nesting in the far north. On this day, also, the spotted fly-catcher appeared in the garden, where it builds every year in one of the apricot trees.

During this month the oyster-catchers remain in larger flocks than at any other time of the year, although many are breeding far inland on the stony banks of the Findhorn, Spey, and other rivers.

The partridge covers its nest and eggs with perhaps greater cunning than any other bird; entirely concealing not only the nest itself, but so disposing the surrounding grass that no vestiges of its track to and fro can be seen: they commence laying here about the 10th of May. The landrails are about a week later.

I have often observed that the black-headed gull eats a great deal of corn in the newly sown fields; and I now find

that the lesser black-backed gull does the same, as I shot one which had a handful of corn (oats and barley) in its crop, mixed up with worms, grubs, &c.

The fishermen at Nairn found, on the 26th of this month, a very fine northern diver, drowned in the stake nets set for salmon. They tell me that it is not a solitary instance, as every year they get one or two at this season. This is another proof that this bird must breed somewhere on the Scotch coast, although I never heard of its eggs being found.

The coots and dabchicks have already commenced making their large platform of a nest. I found one on the loch which the bird had fastened on a floating tree that had grounded in a shallow; but which, having again got adrift, owing to a rise in the loch, had been driven by the wind until it stuck fast close to the shore, where the old bird was still at work. One bird seems to remain in the nest while its mate brings it rushes, which the stationary bird disposes of by adding them to the already large structure, till it seems sufficiently high above the water and solid enough to resist wind and weather. The whole nest is firm enough to bear a much greater weight than is ever imposed on it.

Everywhere on the lakes are broods of young wild ducks, either swimming in close order behind their mothers, or all huddled together in a heap on some little island or projecting point of land.

As we were out driving the other day, a teal came fluttering out of the dry ditch by the roadside, and for above a hundred yards continued flying and running almost under the horse's feet. I found that she had a number of young ones unable to get over the wall, so we helped them into the adjoining wood. They were a long distance from the water, and had very rough ground to pass over to reach it. I remember exactly a similar circumstance happening to me in Ross-shire, when I also saved the lives of a young brood of teal by lending them a helping hand. These instances prove that, notwithstanding the instinct of birds, which generally enables them to keep their young out of harm's way, they occasionally get them into a situation not only of difficulty, but where any dog or mischievous boy coming along might destroy the whole brood. At every ebb tide now, the terns fish with great perseverance for the sandeels on which they almost entirely feed.

The month of May this year appears to have quite changed

its character; instead of being warm and genial, we have nothing but cold and cutting east winds; and the mountains have lost but very little of their winter covering of snow; indeed, on the higher inland mountains their white dresses extend down very nearly as low as in the winter. But notwithstanding the bad weather there is much to amuse and interest one in the sheltered parts of the low country. Every plant and flower is bursting into beauty, in spite of the cold blasts; and the small birds are in full activity, and seem at the height of their happiness. It is also a constant source of amusement to us to watch the various ways of building and the different nests of the small birds. Each nest has its own character, and each bird its own place of concealment. The little willow wren forms one of the most interesting nests, which it places either under a bush in the flower-garden, or in a rough grass-field, where it forms a kind of dome-shaped nest, made to assimilate completely with the surface of the surrounding ground.

The common wren, too, is very choice and careful in the structure of her nest, and sometimes builds in the most singular situations. I saw one this year which was built in a cactus, that hung from the roof of a greenhouse. Every time the little bird wished to add a leaf, or a piece of moss, she had to squeeze and twist herself in through a small hole left for the entrance of a vine stem. Her perseverance and determination were extraordinary; for in spite of all difficulties she managed to form an immense nest in this singularly chosen and picturesque abode. It is difficult to imagine what could have put it into her head to come into the greenhouse at all, and through so awkward an entrance, surrounded, too, as she was by places far more suitable and easy of access.

The badgers live a life of great activity now. In this country they are seldom destroyed: at least, there is one large tract of very wild country, the soil of which is sandy and suitable for their digging propensities, where also they are not often trapped. The badger, when once he has been frightened by, or has escaped from a trap, is not easily caught again; but displays a cunning and perseverance, in eluding all attempts at his capture, which he is not generally supposed to possess.

I seldom declare war against these animals, not considering them very mischievous; but some time ago, wanting one for a friend, I set a strong trap with bait near one of their

holes. A large badger got in, but managed to escape before I came to the trap. I set it again; and the next morning, on going to it, I saw from a distance a number of hooded crows, perched in a tree near the place, in a state of great excitement. On coming up, however, instead of the badger I found an immense grey cat, closely resembling a wild cat, both in colour and ferocity, and which flew straight at me on my approaching her. Having killed her, I left her near the place, covered over with sand; the badgers came and scratched her up, and nearly devoured her by the next morning; so I put traps about the remains of her body; but they managed to spring every trap without being caught, and for several days they escaped in the same way. The traps were always sprung; the badgers' tracks were all round them, and the baits invariably taken away. At last, determined not to be beat, I baited my trap with an apple, as something new and unexpected to them, and immediately caught what I wanted, a fine old badger.

My old keeper was sitting on a hillock about three o'clock one morning in the beginning of May, watching quietly a few wild geese, which he had discovered feeding in a field not very far off, but out of shot. In this hillock was a badger's hole. Presently he heard a grunt behind him, which he took for a pig; and looking round he saw, standing in a clover field close to him, an immensely large badger, whose object seemed to be to get into a hole on the hillock, to reach which he had no alternative but to pass within a yard of the man's legs. After they had looked at each other for some time in this way, the badger at last uttering a most ill-natured kind of grunt, suddenly put his nose to the ground, and passing close to the keeper made a rush to the hole, with all his hair standing straight on end, and showing his teeth in so determined a manner, as completely to take away all presence of mind from the old fellow; so much so, indeed, that he neither shot at him nor obstructed his free entrance to the hole in any way. He tells me that when he has been sitting quietly watching for geese, otters, &c., he has not unfrequently seen the badgers going about together in companies of three or four.

There was a heavy gale of wind at the beginning of this month. I was out late with the keeper, and just before it commenced we saw a very brilliant aurora borealis, or as they term it here, "The Merry Dancers." He told me that when

the aurora was very bright, and the flashes rapidly waving through the sky, he had frequently thought that he heard the merry dancers emit a faint rustling noise, like the "moving of dead leaves," but this was only when the night was quite calm, and there was no sound to disturb the perfect stillness. The idea came from him quite uncalled-for by any remark of mine, and was entirely the result of his own actual observation. I was pleased to hear him say this, as I had more than once imagined that the aurora, when peculiarly bright, and rapid in its movements, DID actually make exactly the sound that he described; but never having heard it asserted by any one else, I had always been rather shy of advancing such a theory.

The aurora is seldom seen, or at least seldom attentively watched in this country, in situations where there is not some sound or other, such as voices, running water, or the rustling and moaning of trees, to break the perfect silence: but it has occasionally happened to me to be gazing at this beautiful illumination in places where no other sound could be heard, and then, and then only, have I fancied that the brightest flashes were accompanied by a light crackling or rustling noise, or as my keeper expressed it very correctly, "the moving of dead leaves." Whether this is so or not I leave to others, more learned in the phenomena of the heavens, to decide, and only mention the circumstance as the passing remark of an unscientific observer.

In the northern mountains of Sutherland, where the aurora is frequently very bright and beautiful, there is a fascinating, nay, an awful attraction in the sight, which has kept me for hours from my bed, watching the waving and ever changing flashes dancing to and fro. I have watched this strange sight where the dead silence of the mountains was only broken by the fancied rustling of the "*dresses*" of the "merry dancers," or by the sudden scream or howl of some wild inhabitant of the rocks; and I have done so until an undefinable feeling of superstitious awe has crept over my mind, which was not without difficulty shaken off.

The aurora, bright as it sometimes is in this country, must be far more wildly and vividly splendid in the more northern and Polar regions. Here it is almost invariably the forerunner of change of weather, or of rough winds and storm.

One night this spring the appearance of the aurora was very peculiar. All the flashes seemed to dart from a common

bright centre in the heavens: this continued for some time, until at length assuming its usual form, it remained comparatively stationary above the north-eastern horizon, and from that quarter there came the next day a severe storm of sleet and wind.

CHAPTER XVII.

JUNE.

Trout Fishing—Sea Trout in the Findhorn—Breeding-place of Black-headed Gulls—Salmon Fishing—Grey Crows—Hair Worms—Fishing—Cromarty—Goats—The Peregrine Falcon.

IN June the trout begin to feed more freely, and from most Highland streams the sportsman may reckon on a good basketful if the day is tolerable. There is a kind of trout in the Findhorn which frequent only the lower pools near the sea; higher up I never saw them; the fishermen call them "brown lugs." In appearance they are between a sea and a river trout: they seldom exceed a pound and a half in weight.

One day about the 1st of June, when fishing in a clear pool near the mouth of the river, a large trout came out from under the bank, and darted over my fly without taking it. I changed the fly, and he did the same thing. I tried him with a dozen different sorts, and he invariably played the same trick, coming out from under the bank, dashing at the fly, then turning short round or rolling over it. At last a minature black midge in my book caught my eye, and I put it on: the moment I cast this fly over the trout he came straight at it in quite a different manner, taking it well into his wide mouth as if at last in earnest. He was well hooked, and then came the tug of war and the trial of patience. The fly was literally speaking a midge, made more as an experiment in fly-making than for any expected use, and it was tied on the finest gut. The trout, on finding that instead of catching a fly he was caught himself, immediately began to try every device that a trout ever imagined to get rid of his tiny enemy. Now he was down at the bottom rubbing his nose on the gravel; the next moment flying straight up into the air with the agility of a harlequin; sometimes with forty yards of line out, and sometimes right under my feet; then away he went as if about to run over the shallow at the end

of the pool on his way to the sea, but changing his mind, darted like an arrow up to the deepest part of the pool, and there he lay like a stone at the bottom. After a little waiting I pelted him out of that mood, and beginning myself to grow eager and desperate (moreover having now more confidence in my midge, which had already passed through a trial which a larger hook might not have stood equally well), I turned his head down the stream, and began to take the game into my own hands a little more—in fact to be the active instead of the passive agent. The trout, too, began to feel weary of the contest, and to allow himself to be led about: at last I brought him to the edge, but just as the landing-net was being delicately slipped under him, away he went again, and ran the line round a broken piece of bank on the opposite side. I am afraid something very like an imprecation escaped me; and if it did, I am confident that Job himself could not blame me. Just as I had quite given all up, the trout most carefully and good-naturedly turned back the way he went, undoing the line again as neatly as possible. After a little more running to and fro he fairly gave in, and this time we got him safely into the landing-net, when I found that he was one of the aforesaid “brown lugs,” weighing nearly 5 lbs.—the largest trout that I ever killed on the Findhorn, and mastered too with a fly only fit for parr of the smallest size.

I have frequently found that when a large trout runs in that undecided manner at my fly, he will go in right earnest at a much smaller one. Salmon are more uncertain: it has happened to me that, even in clear water, a salmon has leaped over or refused a small salmon-fly, but has taken greedily a very large-sized one. But this is an exception; and my experience would lead me, as a general rule, always to offer a fish a smaller fly than the one he rises shyly at; and I believe that I should be borne out in this opinion by more experienced anglers than myself.

I never saw so many black-headed gulls collected together as on the Loch of Belivat, on the property of Lethen: at one end of the loch there are a great many rushes and water-plants; these are, literally speaking, FULL of nests, formed of interwoven rushes, weeds, &c.; and on the islands in the lake you can scarcely land without putting your foot on eggs, which are very slightly protected by anything in the shape of a nest. On this island are a few stunted and bent

willows; every branch and every fork of a branch where a nest can possibly be placed is occupied: this is the only instance I ever met with of gulls building on bushes. The stench on the island is almost insupportable: indeed it was so strong that I hurried off again as quickly as possible: the day was hot, and it actually seemed pestilential. The old birds looked like a shower of drifting snow over our heads, and were as noisy as a dozen village schools broken loose. This was on the 2nd of June, and there were numbers of young gulls recently hatched—curiously marked little tortoiseshell-coloured things, who tottered about the rushes, &c., without the least fear of us. All other birds seemed to be kept away from the lake by the gulls, excepting a few mallards, who were swimming about in a state of bachelorhood, their wives and families being probably in some more quiet and solitary pool in the neighbouring peat mosses. When the mallards rose they were so completely puzzled and “*bebothered*” by the thousands of gulls who were darting and screaming about them, that they gave up attempting to fly away, and came plump down again into the water.

Although the gulls may know each its own nest, it is difficult to understand how they can recognise their young ones amongst the thousands of little downy things which towards the end of the hatching season are floating about upon the water. There is another nesting-place of the black-headed gulls in the forest of Darnaway, where they have taken possession of a small loch surrounded by trees. They usually, however, like all other water-fowl, prefer establishing their breeding-place on a loch situated in the open country, where they can have a good view all around so as to descry the approach of any enemy; but undisturbed possession and quiet have induced them to remain on the Darnaway loch, although it is shut in by trees.

June is generally the best month of the year for angling in Scotland: the loch trout are by this time in good condition, and rise freely at the fly. The grilse also are now in most of the rivers, and afford better angling than any other fish, rising well, and being strong and active when hooked. There appears of late years to be a great diminishing in the number of salmon in all the Scotch rivers: the fish are more protected from the angler, but are caught and destroyed in so many other ways—by constant netting in the streams, by innumerable stake-nets, bag-nets, &c., all along the coasts—

that they have but little chance of keeping up their numbers. From one end of Scotland to the other along the whole extent of the coast, these destructive nets are fixed at every convenient place. Near the mouth of every stream, large or small, they are to be seen, and immense must be the number of fish taken to repay the expense of keeping them up, and renewing the stakes, netting, &c., every spring, and frequently also after severe storms. Near the little stream of Nairn there are no less than three of these nets, and as many more between that point and the Findhorn, all of which are exposed to a heavy sea, which must make the expense of keeping them in repair very great.

On the bar, which is a kind of island, there is a solitary hut, where two or three fishermen pass the spring and summer. In the latter end of winter, when I have been wild-fowl shooting in that direction, I have often gone in to screen myself from the cold. During the absence of the fishermen the hut is tenanted by rabbits, who make themselves quite at home, digging holes in the turf walls, &c. The life of the fishermen in this place must be like that of a lighthouse-keeper. During high tides they are quite cut off from the mainland, and although at low water their place of abode is no longer an island, yet that part of the shore opposite the bar is a kind of wilderness little frequented by anyone, being at a long distance from any road or path, with an extensive tract of rough and all but impassable country extending in every direction. It is, however, a favourite resort of mine, being the undisturbed abode of many wild animals. The roebuck and blackcock live in tolerable security there, and would increase to a very great extent were their young ones not killed by foxes and other vermin, who prowl about without danger of trap or poison.

I had heard that the lochs here called Loch Lee had no fish in them of any kind; but seeing the numerous tracks of otters, and also the cormorants frequently fishing in them, I determined to ascertain what these animals came for; being pretty sure that some kind of fish must be the attraction. Accordingly having made a long "*set line*," i.e. some two hundreds yards of line with strong hooks at intervals of four or five yards, I set it, as far as it would reach, across one part of the largest lake, baiting the hooks with small trout and worms. The next morning on examining the line I found a great number of large eels on the hooks, several of

them weighing above four pounds each. Although I frequently afterwards put in the line, I never caught any fish excepting eels, but of these a vast number. This proves how favourite a food of the otter eels must be, as these animals appear to live constantly at the loch, where they could have found nothing else to prey upon. A highland loch without trout is, however, a rare thing, as they are almost invariably well stocked with them.

There are one or two grassy hillocks near these lakes to which these mischievous robbers, the hooded crows, bring the eggs which they have pilfered in order to eat them at their leisure; and until I administered a dose of strychnia, I never passed these places without finding the fresh remains of eggs: partridges, plovers, snipes, redshanks, wood-pigeon, ducks, and teal, all seemed to have contributed to support these ravenous birds. There was a nest of a teal with eight eggs in a small thicket of heather, in a situation apparently secure from all risk of being discovered. I only knew of it in consequence of my retriever having put up the old bird. Frequently afterwards I saw her on her downy nest, but one day both teal and eggs were gone; and when I went to the grassy hillock which the crows used for a dining-table, there were the remains of all the eight eggs.

Poisoning with strychnia is by far the most effectual way of destroying crows. If you put a piece of carrion in a tree well seasoned with this powerful drug, the ground below it will soon be strewed with the bodies of most of the crows in the neighbourhood, so instantaneous is their death on swallowing any of it. It seems almost immediately to paralyse them, and they fall down on the spot.

In the stagnant pools near the river Nairn there are great numbers of that singular worm called by the country people the hair-worm, from its exact resemblance to a horsehair. In these pools there are thousands of them, twisting and turning about like living hairs. The most singular thing regarding them is that if they are put for weeks in a drawer or elsewhere, till they become as dry and brittle as it is possible for anything to be, and to all appearance perfectly dead and shrivelled up, yet on being put into water they gradually come to life again, and are as pliable and active as ever. The country people are firmly of opinion that they are nothing but actual horsehair turned into living things by being immersed for a long time in water of a certain quality. All

water does not produce them alike. To the naked eye both extremities are quite the same in appearance.

While fishing in the river one day at the beginning of June, my attention was attracted by a terrier I had with me, who was busily employed in turning up the stones near the water's edge, evidently in search of some sort of food. On examining into his proceeding I found that under most of the stones were a number of very small eels: where the ground was quite dry the little fish were dead, and these the dog ate; where there was still any moisture left under the stone they were alive, and wriggled away rapidly towards the stream, seeming to know instinctively which way to go for safety. Trout have undoubtedly the same instinct; and when they drop off the hook by chance, they always wriggle *towards* the water, and never *away* from it. I saw a trout one day who had been left by the receding of the river in a shallow pool. When the water in his narrow place of refuge had got so low as scarcely to cover him he worked his way out of it, and I saw him go over the still wet stones straight to the river, which was about a yard from the pool. It is difficult, indeed almost impossible, to become much acquainted with the habits of fish; but could we pry into their domestic circles, I have no doubt that we should find them possessed of a far higher degree of instinct and much greater cleverness in providing for their food and safety than we give them credit for. The instinct of fish in foretelling, or rather in foreknowing, the changes of weather is very remarkable; and the observant angler may almost prophesy to a certainty with regard to the approach of rain or storms by seeing in what mood, for rising at his flies, the trout may be. In certain states of the weather the angler may put away his tackle without trying to take a single trout; but this can only be learned by experience and close observation.

Sometimes on a fine June evening the sea-fish, such as gurnets and coal-fish, take a large white fly readily enough, and fight most powerfully when of any size.

I took a boat one day to cross over to the rocks of Cromarty, in order to shoot some rock pigeons. The breeze was gentle, but sufficient to take us merrily over; and putting out a couple of lines with large white flies, we caught plenty of gurnet, &c. The fish darted suddenly and with true aim at the flies when close to the boat as readily as when at some distance. After coasting along the rocks for some time, and

shooting a few pigeons, at the risk occasionally of having the bottom of our boat stove in by the hidden rocks round which the large tangle floated gracefully in the passing waves, treacherously concealing the rocks from which they grew, we turned our boat's head homewards. By this time the wind had dropped entirely, and the tide running strong against us, we had to row for four hours in a heavy haddock boat to reach our destination. I had only one man and a boy with me, the latter of no use; so I took an oar myself and pulled steadily on, stopping only occasionally to haul in a gurnet or other fish.

Both goats and sheep were feeding about the rocks, and even the latter seemed to get easily to places which appeared to be reachable only by means of wings. The small patches of bright velvety-looking grass, which grew here and there on corners of ground formed by the débris of the cliffs, however difficult of access, were all tenanted by them.

On one bit of emerald-coloured grass, not larger than a good-sized table-cloth, a sheep and her young lamb were feeding at their ease. Although I stopped the boat and examined the place carefully, no way of access to this little bit of table-land could we discover. The well-contented animals seemed shut out by perpendicular precipices from all the rest of the world.

As for the goats, no ledge or projection of the rocks near which grew any tempting bit of herbage seemed too small or too difficult of approach.

About three weeks ago our tame pochard had been carried away in a hurricane of wind. To my surprise, one day this month I saw this same pochard swimming about the loch alone, and apparently very tame. One of the children who was with me, and whose own especial property the bird had been, whistled to it in the same way in which he had been accustomed to call it, upon which, to his unbounded joy, it immediately came towards us, and for some time continued swimming within a few yards of where we stood, evidently recognising us, and seeming glad to see us again.

A few days afterwards we again saw him; but he was now accompanied by a flock of fourteen or fifteen others. This was remarkable, both on account of the time of year, and because this kind of duck is very rare in this region, and has never been known to breed in the neighbourhood; but all birds seem to have some means of calling and attracting

those of the same species, in a way that we cannot understand.

My peregrine falcon, who still lives in the garden, now utters a call which is different from her usual shrill complaining cry, and which occasionally attracts down to her some wandering hawk of her own kind. The peregrine falcon is well named, for it is found in all countries.

Our bird, from good food, and having always had the run of a large garden, instead of being confined in a room or cage, has grown to a great size, and is in peculiarly fine plumage; with the dark slate colour of her upper feathers forming a beautiful contrast to the rich cream-coloured shade of her neck and breast.

There is scarcely any common animal too large for her to attack when she is hungry. She will fly at dog or cat, as readily as at a rabbit or a rat. The latter animal she kills with great dexterity and quickness; and I have also found the remains of half-grown rabbits, who, having feloniously made their way into the garden, have fallen a prey to her powerful talons.

On changing my residence some weeks ago, I gave a tame peregrine falcon I then had to a friend in the neighbourhood, who keeps her in a walled garden, where she soon became quite at home, and learnt to know her new master as well as she had known me. She almost startled me one day as I was walking in his garden with a bunch of dark-coloured grapes in my hand. The falcon as I passed by her, mistaking the grapes for a bird or some other prey, made a sudden dash at them, and with such violence as in an instant to disperse the whole bunch on the ground, where she hopped about examining grape after grape, and, at last having found out her error, she left them in disgust.

It must be a strong bird that can withstand the rapid powerful swoop and fierce blow of a peregrine. I have seen one strike the head of a grouse or pigeon with one blow, which divided the neck as completely as if it had been cut off with a sharp knife.

Few birds of the same kind vary so much in size as peregrine falcons. Some killed in a wild state are almost as large as the noble ger falcon. Altogether the peregrine is the finest of our British falcons both in size, courage, and beauty. It possesses, too, the free courage and confidence which facilitate so greatly the process of training it to assist us in our field sports.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JULY.

Shore Birds ; arrival of—Foxes—Herring, and Herring Fishing ; Birds, &c., feeding on them—Herring Fishing in Sutherland—A Sharper—Numbers of Flounders—Young Wild Fowl—Roe ; habits of—Midges—Angling—Floods in the Findhorn—Prophecy of a Woman—Escape of a Shepherd.

ABOUT the second week of July the shore and sands are enlivened by vast flocks, or rather clouds, of dunlins, ring-dottrels, and other birds of the same kind, who now, coming down from their scattered breeding-places, collect in immense companies. When the tide ebbs, all these birds are employed in searching for the minute shell-fish and animalcula, on which they feed ; and vast indeed must be the supply required. About the lochs and swamps the young snipes and redshanks begin to fly, and with the wild ducks afford plenty of shooting.

The young gea-gulls, too, are numerous about the bar and sandbanks, and are easily distinguished from the old ones by their fine mottled brown plumage.

Great numbers of all these birds must be killed by foxes, &c. ; for every day I observe their fresh tracks along the shore and round the lochs. Near a fox's hole in one of the woods I saw an almost incredible collection of remains and *disjecta membra* of ducks, turkeys, fowls, game of every kind, and even of roe : apparently a litter of young foxes had been brought up in it.

On the 12th of July the Nairn herring-boats are all launched to reap their uncertain harvest of herrings. Of late years the supply does not seem to be nearly so regular or so much to be depended on as formerly ; and frequently the men are but badly repaid for all their expense and risk. The cost of a herring-boat here, complete with its riggings, nets, &c., is not much less than ninety pounds ; and the wear and tear of the nets is very great, owing to bad weather and other causes : the hull alone of the boat costs about twenty-seven pounds. There are five men in each boat ; and Nairn alone sends out about sixty boats, so that from that small place not less than three hundred able-bodied men are for six or seven weeks employed in the pursuit of this small but valuable fish. The herrings are generally bought up beforehand by the fishcurers at Helmsdale, on the Sutherland coast, and at other parts, who contract to take the whole

proceeds of the season's fishing at a fixed price ; so that notwithstanding the immense number caught, the supply of fresh herrings through the country is but scanty. The fish are, with as little delay as possible, packed in casks with brine, and in this state are exported to all parts of the kingdom. The barrels are made principally of birch. Fir will not answer the purpose, as it gives a taste of turpentine to the whole contents of the barrel. I have been out in a herring-boat during the fishing ; and a very beautiful sight it is to see the nets hauled in with thousands of herrings, looking in the moonlight like so many pieces of the brightest silver flashing in the calm water. When not employed with the nets, the men generally fish with hooks for cod, halibut, &c. ; all fish caught in this manner being the perquisite of the man who catches them ; and frequently they make a good profit by this, as the cod collect in vast numbers about the herring-fishing grounds, and are caught as quickly as the hooks can be dropped into the water. Sometimes the cod, their great indistinctly seen forms looking like the pale ghosts of fish, come close to the surface round the boats, and seize the bait as soon as it touches the water. Hauling these heavy gentry up from the depth of several fathoms is very severe work for the hands.

The herrings seem the most persecuted of all the races of living creatures. From the moment when the great shoals of them appear in the north and north-west they are pursued by thousands and tens of thousands of birds and countless numbers of fishes : and wherever the herring shoals are, *there* are these devourers. From the aristocratic salmon to the ignoble and ferocious dogfish, all follow up and prey upon the shoals ; while their feathered foes mark out their track by the constant screaming and plunging into the water which they keep up during their pursuit. The Solan geese from mid-air dash with unerring aim on the bright and silvery fish ; whilst the cormorants and other diving sea-fowl pursue the dense crowd with indefatigable eagerness. In addition to all this, sea-gulls of every kind, like the skirmishers of an army, keep up a constant pursuit of all stragglers or wounded fish which come near enough to the surface to be caught by these birds, who have neither the power of the Solan goose, to pounce hawk-like on their prey (even when at some depth from the surface), nor the diving power of the cormorant or guillemot, who can pursue them deep down

into the water. Altogether, a shoal of herring with its numerous accompaniments is a most amusing and interesting sight, independent of the consideration of the great importance of this fish to mankind, the number of people to whom it serves as food, and the number who are employed in its pursuit.

Besides the natives of the fishing villages, a considerable number of Highlanders from the western part of the country come down to earn a few pounds during the herring season; it is almost the only cash these poor fellows get hold of in the course of the year. Most of the boats belong to two or three proprietors each, who having in the course of many years laid by a few pounds, expend them in the purchase of a herring-boat. These men hire the services of four or five hands for the season, the duration of which is about six weeks, and give them a certain sum, according to agreement, generally about four to six pounds per man. Unluckily, many of the families of the herring-fishers derive but little benefit from the wages earned, as too frequently the men spend all the money, or nearly all, in drinking and rioting as soon as the fishing is over, and instead of providing for their wives and children, are too apt to lounge about the whisky-shops as long as a farthing remains, never attending to the haddock or other fishing till driven again to exertion by sheer necessity. This, however, does not apply to the whole race of herring-fishers. Those men who come to the fishing on the east coasts from the Highlands generally take their money carefully home, depending on it for buying clothes, paying rent, procuring seed-potatoes, and for any purpose where ready money is required.

To the spectator the pursuit of herrings in the magnificent sea-lochs of Sutherland is attended with much that is interesting and beautiful. When the fleet of boats makes its way up a creek running far into the land, and overhung by wild rocky precipices, which protect the boats from every breath of wind, keeping the sea as smooth as glass, and echoing and re-echoing every merry shout and call uttered by the fishermen during their pursuit, no description can give an adequate idea of the romantic beauty of such a scene with all its accompaniments. This, however, is the bright side of the picture, for many a dangerous gale and many a peril have the poor fellows to encounter who shoot their herring-nets off the bleak eastern coasts of the country, where they are

exposed to the sudden gales and rolling seas of the Northern and German Oceans. Frequently to save their lives, they are compelled to abandon their nets, fish and all. Sometimes boats with their crews go forth to return no more, nor even to be again heard of in this world; and at other times they are driven to distant ports for safety, losing their tackle and time, and having to make their way back with scanty supply of provision to the port from which they sailed, and probably losing their chance of fishing for the whole season.

Would it be believed that the herring fisher, humble as his situation in life appears, is occasionally the object of a regular and systematic plan of swindling? A few years ago, a fellow made it his occupation and business to waylay these poor men as they returned home from the fishing-stations with their hardly-earned money in their pockets. His plan was to get into conversation with them, and after walking a mile or two along the road with them, to take generally one, but sometimes two, into a whisky-shop, of which there are plenty on every Highland road, under the pretence of treating them to a dram. Then, as opportunity offered, he produced a small flask from his pocket, which he said contained a sample of some rare whisky (having previously represented himself as a spirit-merchant travelling for orders), and as a special favour gave the fisherman a glass of its contents. It was no sooner swallowed, however, than the man became powerless and almost insensible; upon which the fellow quietly emptied the pockets of his victim and walked off, leaving him to recover as he could: which event in most instances did not take place for some hours afterwards. If in going out he met with the keeper of the whisky-shop, he told him that the man was asleep from fatigue, or made some such excuse to escape suspicion. In this manner the fellow robbed above twenty fishermen of the whole proceeds of their fishing before the country got too hot for him; when he went off by the coach and was no more heard of. The whole proceeding was described to me by one of his victims (at present in my service), who was robbed of about five pounds, and notwithstanding the cruelty of the case, I could not help being amused at the coolness with which the swindler appears to have turned the poor fellow's pockets inside out, the man all the while being quite conscious of what was going on, though utterly unable to move or speak. To add insult to injury, too, on going out

the swindler told the landlady that he was sorry to say the fisherman had got quite drunk, notwithstanding all the efforts he had made to prevent it, and all the good advice he had given him. When at length the poor fellow recovered his senses and power of speech, he found it quite impossible to persuade his wife and friends that he had not wilfully and advisedly got drunk and squandered his money. However at last the fair one was pacified, though not much comforted, her husband's innocence being proved by the testimony of others who had been robbed in a similar manner; and by the verdict of the doctor, who at once saw that some strong narcotic had been given to the man.

Among the available products of the sandy creeks and bays on this coast are immense quantities of excellent flounders. These fish come in with every tide, and though the great bulk of them return to deep water, vast numbers remain in the pools which are formed at low water upon the sands. We occasionally drag some of these pools with a small trout-net, and are sure to catch a large quantity of these fish in one or two hauls. The flounders are of two kinds, the grey-backed flounder and a larger sort which has red spots. The latter, however, is a far inferior fish, the flesh being soft and flabby. Notwithstanding the abundance and excellence of the flounders, left, as it were, for any person to pick up, with scarcely any exertion, the country people very seldom take the trouble to catch them, excepting now and then by the line, in a lazy, inefficient way.

July, although not a month during which the sportsman finds much employment for his gun, is still to me a most interesting season. Every day that I walk by the lochs and swamps I see fresh arrivals in the shape of broods and flocks of young teal and wild ducks, and this year there are numbers of pochards swimming about in compact companies. Occasionally, too, when walking near the covers an old roe, accompanied by her two large-eyed fawns, bounds out of some clump of juniper or brambles; and after standing for a short time to take a good look at me, springs into the wood and is soon lost to view, or an old solitary buck, driven by the midges from the damp shades of the woods, startles me by his sudden appearance near the loch side, springing over the furze and broom, on his way back to the more extensive covers.

The roe have a singular habit of chasing each other in

regular circles round particular trees in the woods, cutting a deep circular path in the ground. I never could make out the object of this manœuvre, but the state of the ground proves that the animals must have run round and round the tree for hours together.

Tormented by midges and ticks, the bucks often wander restlessly through the woods at this season, uttering their bark-like cry; so like indeed is this sound to the bark of a dog, that it often deceives an unaccustomed ear. Of all torments produced by insects I can conceive nothing much worse than the attack carried on by the myriads of midges which swarm towards evening in the woods, particularly where the soil is at all damp. For a certain time the smoke of a cigar or pipe protects one; but no human skin can endure for any length of time the inexpressible irritation produced by these insects.

This month is not, generally speaking, favourable to the angler. Salmon seem in most rivers to have given up moving, and the trout follow their example. Indeed the rivers are at this period very subject to great changes, being one day bright, clear, and very low; and perhaps the next flooded over bank and brae by some sudden and tremendous thunder-storm in the higher grounds which renders the water thick and turbid. The Findhorn is peculiarly subject to these rapid changes, flowing as it does for a great part of its course through a mountainous, undrained, and uncultivated country, surrounded by lofty and rugged heights, from the clefts of which innumerable streams descend into the valley of the Findhorn. This river, on any sudden and violent storm of rain (fed as it is by so many burns), rises sometimes almost instantaneously: and what a few minutes before was a bright clear stream, fordable at all the shallower places, suddenly becomes a turbid swollen torrent, which neither man nor horse can cross. In those parts of the river where the channel is narrow and confined between steep and overhanging rocks these sudden risings take place more rapidly than in the lower parts near the sea, where the river has room to spread itself out.

One day towards the end of the month I went with my two boys and a servant to shoot rabbits on the island formed by the junction of the Findhorn and another stream near the sea. The river was so low, in consequence of long-continued dry weather, that we crossed it on foot at a shallow where

the water did not reach to our knees. The day was hot and the air heavy and oppressive; and although we had not had a drop of rain, we heard loud thunder during the whole morning, and saw heavy black clouds hanging in the west, over the mountains through which the river runs. After idling about some time and shooting a few rabbits, &c., we went towards a small cottage built on the highest part of the island, in order to speak to the people who inhabited it. Whilst standing close to the door, we heard a sudden scream from a woman at work in the little plot of garden, and looking round we at once saw the cause. The river, as the woman emphatically expressed it, was "*coming down*." Over a wide space of sand and shingle interspersed with patches of broom and furze, where a few moments before we had been hunting rabbits, there now came rushing down a wall of muddy water, carrying with it turf, stones, and trees, rolling over and over and uprooting every bush which opposed it. Several of the trees must have come some miles down the river, being large Scotch firs, with their branches, stems, and roots, the latter frequently still carrying in their twisted fibres great masses of the rocks on which they had grown. The water was coming down like a wall of several feet high, sweeping everything before it; and in far less time than I have taken to describe it, we were surrounded on all sides with its muddy torrent. Independently of the risk of being crushed to death by the floating and rolling trees, its rapidity was so great that the strongest swimmer could not have crossed it.

On came the flood, narrowing our little island every instant, by undermining and washing away the bank on which the cottage stood. Nevertheless I anticipated no more inconvenience than perhaps having to pass the night where we were: for the building had stood all the torrents of the Findhorn since the great flood of 1829, although its inhabitants had more than once been cut off from any communication with the mainland for several days together. But the water was already higher than it had ever been since *that* flood, and the women of the house were weeping in despair, their terrors being augmented by a prophecy which had lately been uttered by an old hag in the neighbourhood, to the effect that all the country within six miles of the coast should be swallowed up by floods during the last week of this very July. So strong an effect had this prediction on the minds

of the lower orders, that almost all the Highlanders who had come down to the coast, according to their custom, for the herring fishing, had returned homewards without putting their foot in a boat, to the great loss and inconvenience of the owners of the boats and nets, who had reckoned on the usual assistance of these men. It is singular that floods of a most mischievous and unusual extent should actually have taken place at the very time this woman had foretold.

For my own part I felt chiefly annoyed at the alarm our absence would occasion at home, as it was already evening, and we had no means of making signals or of sending word where we were, it being quite impossible to cross the river at any point.

The water still rose, and continued to do so for half an hour longer, washing away our standing-place slowly but constantly. On looking round I could not but feel most grateful at our not having been overtaken by it before we reached this part of the island. Had we been in many of the places over which we had so lately passed we must have been swept away at the first rise of the river, or at best have had to wade and scramble, at the risk of our lives, to some elevated point of land.

While standing near the house we saw two or three boats belonging to the ferryman and the salmon-fishers whirl past us. The flood having come on without the least warning, their owners had had no time to secure them. The rise, as I have said, continued for about half an hour, then suddenly it stopped, and in a few minutes the water began visibly to fall. Before long it fell more quickly, but still in no proportion to the rapidity with which it had risen. After it had been sinking somewhat above an hour, the tops of furze bushes began to appear above the water, and soon afterwards we saw a boat belonging to the salmon fishers, well manned, and assisted by a rope held on the shore, coming down to a cottage a quarter of a mile above us. The main stream of the river was still quite impracticable; but this boat was coming down an old channel which was generally dry. By firing off my gun several times I caught the attention of the crew; and I was quite certain that they would know who it was that wanted help, and would come to us if possible. When the torrent had become somewhat less violent they came down, whirling through the flood to where we were. They took us on board, and by dint of skilful and strong

rowing, and help from the rope held by those on shore, we were at length landed in a field, *not* across the real channel of the river, but across the flooded land on the other side of us, where the force of the water was less violent. Although I have been in a good many situations of danger by water, I never felt so helpless as whilst we were dashing about at the mercy of the torrents, over bushes, banks, and stranded trees, had we come in contact with any one of which, our small boat must have been upset, and then all chance of escape would have been out of the question. However, we landed safely, and although we were not above a quarter of a mile from my house, we had to walk round by the chain bridge, a distance of five miles. We got home soon after dark, and before our absence had caused any alarm. With us the rain did not begin till the evening, but we afterwards heard that, further to the west, it had rained in torrents for many hours during the morning, accompanied by a most terrific thunderstorm, and that a great deal of damage had been done by the overflowing of different streams, which had broken up several bridges, and injured a great extent of land. A poor woman who happened to be wading the river a mile above us, at a place where it is divided into several streams, was caught in one of them, and although she managed to get upon a high bank, the flood soon reached her, and she was kept a prisoner, standing in the water, which at one time reached to her middle, till the fishermen heard her cries, and succeeded in rescuing her. Had we been in many spots where we fished almost every day, nothing could have saved our lives.

A singular instance of preservation from a similar danger happened during the same flood, but on a different river. On perceiving that the water was rising, a young man hurried across a shallow part to an island, on which were a few sheep grazing, intending to recross with them to the main land before the flood had attained any serious height. He was, however, out in his reckoning; for he had scarcely set foot on the island when the river became so swollen that it was quite impossible for him to return. The flood soon covered the island, and the man had great difficulty to keep his footing, being up to his waist in water. To add to his danger, great pieces of timber and floating trees came sweeping past, any one of which, had it struck him, would have at once dashed him off the island. Several people who were on the shore, although so near, could do nothing to assist him.

Presently, the flood brought down, right upon the island, a gigantic tree, with all its roots and branches, and it seemed certain that he must be swept away at once. He was given up by all the spectators, and they turned away their eyes, not daring to look at this last act of the scene. However, the very moment when the danger seemed the greatest, was that of his deliverance; for the tree, in consequence of its great size and weight, grounded when within a yard of the man. He managed to scramble on to its branches, and to maintain his position until the waters subsided.

What becomes of the trout during these sudden floods it is not easy to say, unless, warned by instinct of the approaching danger, they retire to the deep holes and recesses under the banks, where the force of the water cannot reach them. It is very seldom that, on the receding of a flood, fish are found on the land, though certainly it occasionally happens that they are bewildered, and are either left high and dry or in the small pools at the sides of the river. When, also, the same cause that has made the stream overflow has filled the water with clay and dirt, the trout become sick and weak, and are unable to contend with a force of current which they could easily have withstood in clear water.

As the flood decreases both trout and eels take to all the eddies and corners to feed on the numerous worms and grubs which are washed off the banks and fields into the water.

Very few birds or, comparatively speaking, even land animals, fall victims to floods. The rabbits manage to climb up into the highest furze bushes, or even into the branches of trees, and it is very seldom that any birds make their nests within reach of this danger. In the same manner that terns and other birds who lay their eggs on the seashore seem to have an instinct which teaches them the exact line to which the highest spring tides ever reach, so do the land birds avoid building their nests in places to which the land floods ever ascend.

CHAPTER XIX.

AUGUST.

Golden Plover--Ring Dottrel--Migratory Birds--Butterflies--Crabs; their manner of casting their shells--The Sea Angler--The Deal Fish--Habits of Woodcocks--A pet Roe--Grouse Shootings and Grouse--Wild Fowl.

DURING the first part of this month the mountain-bred birds, such as golden plover, dottrel, curlew, &c., are daily seen to

collect more and more in flocks on the seashore or other places which suit their habits. In the lower parts of the country the dottrel is now a very rare bird, and it is seldom that many of them are killed, although they are so tame and easy of approach as to have obtained for themselves the local name of the "foolish dottrel." It is one of the peculiarities of this bird that one pair only breeds on the same hill or mountain. Whilst you may see thousands of golden plovers on a hillside during the breeding season, you will never find above one pair of dottrel on each ridge. The ring-dottrel and other shore birds become at this season more numerous day by day. Many insectivorous birds, also, such as the whitethroat, redstart, &c., seem to draw gradually towards the eastern coasts of the kingdom, as if in readiness to depart. The wheatears almost entirely leave the wild rocky mountains of the North, where they breed, and are during this month caught in great numbers on the South-downs of Sussex.

The regularity of the appearance and disappearance of birds in different districts is one of the most striking and interesting parts of their history, and is a subject worthy of more attention than it has hitherto received. It is well known to many sportsmen that woodcocks appear in certain woods and even under certain holly bushes, or other favourite spots, on the same day of the same month year after year, and in like manner and with equal punctuality do numberless smaller birds, of less notoriety and of less consequence to the sportsman, make their annual flittings northwards or southwards. On referring to notes which I have made during several years, I find that I have seen many migratory birds for the first time in each year, on either the very same day of the month or within one day of it.

Even in the insect world the same punctuality in their change of abode is kept up, and an observant "*out-of-door*" entomologist will tell almost to a day when any particular moth or butterfly will first appear. The exclusiveness of some butterflies as to their locality is a very striking peculiarity of this insect. You may, year after year, find a certain kind in great numbers within a space of a hundred yards, but you may search in vain for a single specimen over the whole surrounding country; although both as to plants and soil it may seem as favourable for their production as the spot to which they confine themselves. I was told by a

clever entomologist that I should find any number of specimens of a particular butterfly, which I wanted to procure, in a certain stone quarry, or rather where a quarry had *once* been, during the first and second week in August, but at no other time and in no other situation. My friend was perfectly right. Then and there, and then and there only, could I find this particular butterfly. There are few districts of the kingdom where a man of leisure would not find plenty to interest and amuse him were he to direct his attention to the peculiar habits and instincts of living animals from the highest to the lowest, from the eagle to the insect which he treads unconsciously under his feet every step he takes. People little know by how many natural objects of beauty and interest they are everywhere surrounded. How true is a French saying that "*L'oisiveté est la mère de toutes les vices*;" and how many cares and troubles would thousands avoid did they employ their leisure hours in such pursuits instead of letting idleness lead them into numberless evil habits! It is for this reason that I always like to see the study of natural history encouraged in children.

At the beginning of August I frequently find the crabs (which frequent the rocks left exposed at low water) either just about to change their shell, or just after having changed it. Nothing can be more curious than the manner in which they contrive to draw their legs and claws out of their last year's covering, casting their entire shell perfectly whole and unbroken. A tough skin seems to form over the flesh, under the shell, and of the same colour, which apparently hardens rapidly by exposure (when it is uncovered) and this skin forms the new shell.

The poor animals are quite helpless till this hardens, and are at the mercy of their numerous enemies. The fishermen say that whilst the female crab is in this weak state the male constantly attends on and protects her. I have myself often seen a crab in her still unhardened shell, closely accompanied by a larger crab, whose shell was perfectly hard, and who offered battle most valiantly when he and his spouse were approached.

During the herring fishing it frequently happens that some strange and rarely seen monster of the sea gets either entangled in the nets or is cast upon the shore, during his pursuit of the shoals of smaller fish. Among others I have more than once seen a most hideous large-headed brute of a

fish, whom the country people calls sometimes "the sea-devil," sometimes "the sea-angel," but whose more regular cognomen is, I believe, "the sea-angler." The first name he owes to his excessive and wicked-looking ugliness; the second must have been given him ironically; whilst the third is derived from his reputed habit of attracting fish to their destruction by a very wily ruse. He buries himself, it is said, in the sands by scraping a hole with his two most unseemly and deformed-looking "hands," which are placed below what may be called his chin. Being in this way quite concealed, he allows some long worm-like appendages, which grow from the top of his head, to wave and float above the surface of the sand: fish taking these for some kind of food are attracted to the spot, when the concealed monster by a sudden spring manages to engulf his victims in the fearfully wide cavity of his mouth, which is armed with hundreds of teeth sloping inwards, and as hard and sharp as needles, so that nothing which has once entered it can escape. So runs the tale, the exact truth of which I am not prepared to vouch for.

A rare and singularly formed fish was once brought to me during the month of August by the fishermen. It is called the "Deal fish," or, locally, the "Saw fish." The latter name is very expressive of its shape and proportions, the fish being flat *vertically* instead of, like a sole or flounder, *horizontally*. The following is the description of the fish which I set down at the time :—

Length, 3 feet 6 inches.

Depth, 7 inches.

Greatest thickness, between half and three quarters of an inch.

Colour, bright silver, with one very thin crimson fin running the whole length of its back.

The tail very transparent, fan-shaped, and of a bright crimson.

A large flat eye;

And a small mouth, which the fish had a peculiar power of elongating to a considerable extent.

It had managed to get hooked through the back by a common haddock-hook. I wished to have preserved the skin, as I believe that there are not above one or two perfect specimens extant; but, unluckily, through a mistake the fish was destroyed.

August 4th.—We caught a young woodcock full grown in one of the woods near here. A dog disturbed it in the cover; and it flew fluttering into the road, where it allowed itself to

be caught by the hand, although it was quite as large as an old bird, and its wings apparently fully feathered.

The woodcock breeds every season in the north of Scotland, not only in the large fir plantations, but also in the smaller patches of birch, &c., which fringe the shores of many of the most northern lakes. That those bred in the country migrate I have no doubt, as they all invariably disappear for two or three months between summer and the first frosts of winter. As I have seen their nests at all times from March to August, it is natural to suppose that the woodcock breeds more than once in the season.

I have again, this year, seen the old woodcocks carry their young down to the soft, marshy places to feed. Unfitted as their feet appear to be for grasping anything, the old birds must have no slight labour in carrying their whole family (generally consisting of four) every evening to the marshes, and back again in the morning. They always return before sunrise.

Occasionally I have come upon a brood of young woodcocks in a dark, quiet, swampy part of the woods near which they had probably been bred. In a case of this kind we may suppose that the old birds are saved the trouble of conveying their young to a distant feeding-place; but as the young birds are frequently hatched in long heather in dry situations, and far from any marshes, they would inevitably perish in the nest were they not daily carried backwards and forwards by their parents. The quantity of worms required to sustain one of these birds would astonish those town-bred naturalists who gravely assert that the woodcock "*lives on suction*."

Whilst walking in a wood I was surprised at seeing a roe standing within a little distance of me, with a silver bell hung round its neck. Having taken a good look at me, the beautiful little animal bounded off into the recesses of the wood, ringing its bell, to the astonishment of the rabbits who were feeding about the openings of the cover. This roe belonged to the ladies at Darnaway; and, with the usual wilfulness of such pets, had wandered away from its proper home, where it lived in security and plenty, petted by all, and had taken up its abode in the wood, which was several miles from Darnaway, and where it ran the risk of being worried by colley dogs or shot while feeding in the neighbouring corn-fields. Once or twice afterwards, when I was shooting in this wood, the beagles started and ran the roe

some distance before I could stop them. As long as he continued ringing his bell through this cover I seldom saw any other roe in it, although at other times it was a favourite resort of these beautiful creatures. Once it followed, for some distance towards Darnaway, a servant who had been accustomed to feed and pet it, but taking alarm at some people at work in a field, it turned back again. I do not know what was the end of the pretty animal, but towards the winter it disappeared, and I fear it was shot by some poaching fellow whilst feeding in the fields where it was often seen. Its silver bell made it both an easier and a more valuable victim.

August 12th.—On this (to so many people) *dies memorabilis*, whilst shooting with a friend in Inverness-shire, I found a few old grouse lying dead, killed by the prevailing disease, which of late years has committed such havoc among these birds in certain districts; some which we killed were already attacked by it. Whenever this was the case we invariably observed that the plumage of the bird was much altered, having a rusty red appearance instead of the fine rich colour characteristic of the grouse. The feathers, too, had an unnatural kind of dryness about them, which gave the bird a bleached, unhealthy look. In those grouse which I opened myself the presence of the disease was indicated by the liver being apparently rotten.

Whatever is the cause of this mortality, it is a matter of some consequence to the proprietors of those districts where the grouse shootings let for as high or a higher rent than the sheep pasturage; for it can scarcely be expected that Englishmen will continue paying at the rate they do for the right of shooting over tracts of ground where the grouse are becoming almost extinct, as is the case in several places. Instead of sparing the birds where they are attacked by this epidemic, I should be much more inclined to shoot down every grouse in the infected parts of the hills; and I would continue to do this as long as any appearance of the disease remained. I would then give them a year or two of rest, according to the numbers and appearance of the birds. This seems to me the most likely way to check the destruction caused by what the keepers call the "grouse disease." In some parts of the Highlands there were scarcely any young birds seen in August, and the old grouse were picked up in dozens, dead on the heather.

I observed one peculiarity in the habits of the grouse in 1847, which was new to me. They were collected in large flocks on the 12th of August in the fields of oats in the elevated districts, which were at that time perfectly unripe and green. In every field near the moors there were large flocks of the old birds busy in the midst of the corn; but they always took the precaution to leave some sentries outside, who, perched on a piece of rock or an old wall, stood with their necks stretched to their utmost height, on the look-out for any approaching enemy. When the corn is ripe, and especially after it is cut and in sheaves on the fields, the grouse are very fond of it, and fill their crops daily with oats, like so many chickens, but before this season I never saw them attack the green and empty oats. There was at this time a very unusual deficiency in the growth and bloom of the heather, causing a great scarcity of the tender shoots which form the principal food of grouse; and this may have driven them to the new kind of food, to which they appeared to take very kindly.

It is in the oat-fields belonging to the small farmers and others living near the grouse hills where the greatest havoc is committed amongst grouse by the poachers, for there they can be caught with the greatest facility, in any number that may be required for the market; and it is more difficult for keepers to prevent this kind of poaching than any other, as it may be carried on by girls or children late in the evening and early in the morning, the snares being removed during the daytime, or on the appearance of a keeper, whose approach in this kind of open country may be perceived from a sufficient distance to enable the poacher to remove all traces of his proceedings. Thousands of grouse are killed in this manner for the London and other markets.

This year, 1848, on the very first day of the shooting, I happened to be in a poulterer's shop in a large town in Northumberland, when a servant came in to buy a brace or two of "*well-kept grouse, fit for immediate use,*" for his master: and a brace was instantly handed to him from amongst a great number, which looked as if they had been killed a week or ten days; at any rate they were nearly putrid, and according to my taste, fit only to be flung away. If this system commences so long before the birds are legally saleable, we may easily imagine what an immense number of grouse are illegally destroyed during the whole season, in spite of all the expenses incurred to preserve them.

In my opinion this wholesale system of poaching might easily be put a stop to by the *proprietors* of the land, who, by stringent agreements with their sheep-tenants and cottars, might prevent all trespassing on the hills, much more easily than the tenants of shootings can do; and really considering the great profit in many ways that this bird is to the Highland landowners, it seems both their interest and duty to protect and assist sportsmen in every possible manner in preserving the game: whereas, let the matter be glossed over as it may, every lessee of grouse shootings knows how very little assistance and encouragement he receives from nine proprietors out of ten, notwithstanding the liberal and sometimes exorbitant rents which are paid. There are, however, many exceptions to this state of things; and landlords are yet to be found who identify the interest of their tenants with their own.

The rage for grouse-shooting, at present so great, is not likely to change, like many other fashions. The fine air, the freedom, the scenery, and all the other *agrémens* accompanying this amusement, must always make it the most fascinating kind of sport in the way of shooting which the British isles, or indeed almost any country, can afford. The bird, too, in beauty and gamelike appearance, is not to be equalled. In fact as long as grouse and heather exist, and the nature of man is imbued with the same love for sport and manly exercise as it now is, grouse-shooting will be one of our favourite relaxations from the graver cares of life.

Although, like others, I am excessively fond of this sport, yet I care little for numbers of slain; and when following it independently and alone, am not occupied solely by the anxiety of bagging so many brace. My usual plan when I set out is to fix on some burn, some cool and grassy spring, or some hill summit which commands a fine view, as the extremity of my day's excursion. To this point then I walk, killing what birds come in my way, and after resting myself and dogs, I return by some other route. Undoubtedly the way to kill the greatest number of grouse is to hunt one certain tract of ground closely and determinedly; searching every spot as if you were looking for a lost needle, and not leaving a yard of heather untried. This is the most killing system, as every practised grouse-shooter knows; but to me it is far less attractive than a good stretch across a range of valley and mountain, though attended with fewer shots. I

am also far more pleased by seeing a brace of good dogs do their work well, and exhibiting all their fine instinct and skill, than in toiling after twice the number when hunted by a keeper, whose only plan of breaking the poor animals in is to thrash them until they are actually afraid to use half the wonderful intellect which nature has given them.

Although the 20th of August is the day appointed for legal execution of the blackcock, yet in most seasons the 1st of September would be quite soon enough for the shooting to begin, as until the commencement of September the young birds have seldom acquired their strength or plumage, and can be knocked down before the pointer's nose with a stick almost as easily as shot; indeed I have frequently seen them caught in the hand. When in full vigour and plumage there is no handsomer bird than an old blackcock, and although his size makes him an easy mark, his cunning and strength are pretty good securities for his not falling too readily to the sportsman's gun. But in August even the old birds are not fit to shoot, being neither in perfect condition nor in full plumage. The blackcock is much more addicted to feeding in the cornfields than the grouse is, and takes long flights for the purpose of reaching some favourite stubble-field.

Few stags have got the velvet off their horns during August, except in favoured situations, where good feeding in the spring and winter has enabled them to keep up their condition and the strength which is required for the production and growth of their weighty antlers.

I find that towards the end of August, when the hill-lakes and swamps are much disturbed by grouse-shooters, the wild ducks bring down their young broods in great numbers, both to the bay and to the lochs. Every evening I can make sure of killing a brace or two as they fly to the corn-fields regularly when the sun sets; indeed they sometimes do considerable damage by trampling down and eating the corn before it is cut. But some of the wild ducks which are killed in the bogs and swamps have their crops full of the seeds of a coarse grass which grows in these places, and also of some of the wild fruits, such as blackberries, &c. Indeed I fancy that a wild duck is about as omnivorous a creature as can be found, almost as much so as the man who eats him: nothing which he can swallow comes amiss to him, whether fish, flesh, or grain. The teal, on the contrary, appears to be

almost wholly insectivorous: at least these birds feed only in the swamps and shallow pools, never taking to the fields for grain or seeds; but living entirely on aquatic insects and some few small plants.

Although the widgeon breed in Sutherlandshire, and perhaps in other parts of Scotland, I never saw one in this part of the country during July or August. I believe that this bird feeds neither on grain nor insects, but on aquatic grasses; and when these are not to be had, he grazes readily on the grass-fields, and banks near the sea.

The great art in getting at most wild fowl is to discover their feeding-places; for to these they always resort at certain times either of the day or of the tide, some kinds being more dependent than others on the ebb and flow of the sea; whilst the common mallard is almost wholly nocturnal in his feeding, and does not regulate his movements by the state of the tide.

The sheldrakes, who were so numerous a few weeks ago about the sandbanks and bar, have now nearly all disappeared; and their places are supplied by innumerable curlews and other waders, all of whom appear to find their food in the moist sands, left by the ebb tide, which in this country contain an endless supply of shellfish of different kinds, from the minutest species, fit only to feed the dunlin and sand-piper, to those which serve for food to the oyster-catcher, whose powerful bill is well adapted to breaking up the strongest cockles and mussels which are found in this district.

CHAPTER XX.

SEPTEMBER.

The 1st of September—Partridge Shooting—Migratory Birds—Grouse-shooting in September—Widgeon—Jack Snipes; Breeding places of—Land-rail—White variety of the Eagle—Sea Trout-fisher—Stags Horns—Deer-stalking—Cunning of Deer—Disappointed in getting a Shot.

THE 1st of September is by no means so marked a day with sportsmen in the north as it is with those in the southern parts of the kingdom. I well remember the eager haste with which, when a boy, I used to sally forth at the earliest dawn to wage war on the partridges. The birds, however, at that hour, are restless and on the alert, the ground is wet, and the

sport unsatisfactory; and in fact no one, I believe, who can number more than sixteen summers ever got up at three o'clock to shoot partridges without repenting his undue activity before mid-day.

In this country very little of the corn is cut at the commencement of September, and I never attempt to shoot more partridges than I may happen to want for the larder. As long as the fields are covered with standing corn, the only way is to hunt quietly round the hedgerows, and banks exposed to the sun, or in dry soiled turnip fields, during the middle of the day, when the birds come to bask and scratch. Both partridges and hares stick close to standing corn as long as an acre of it remains.

In this country, however, the wild fowl and other birds which frequent the shores and rocks always afford me as amusing sport as the best partridge-shooting; and at this season there is always a constant and endless variety of migratory birds collecting previous to their departure.

There is one very numerous class of birds, the sandpipers and others of the same kind, which are very little known. Even the best and most quoted authors of works on natural history are constantly in error with regard to the names and classification of these birds, and although I do not pretend to be acquainted with *all*, or *nearly all*, the varieties, I know enough of them to perceive that the numerous changes of plumage which each species goes through, according to their age, sex, and the season of the year, have completely misled most naturalists. Indeed to know these birds perfectly requires much greater attention and more minute examination than has yet been expended upon them. Such also is the case as regards sea-gulls, and some kinds of hawks, though with these the difficulty is not so great.

I always find that the grouse are wilder in September than in any other month. They are well scared and driven about by the August shooting, and are not yet tamed down by the autumnal frosts and cold.

In this part of Scotland we have much wild and stormy weather in September; and many an English sportsman towards the end of the month, when located in some small shooting-lodge, in the wild and distant glens of the inland mountains, begins to think of turning his way southwards. The incessant rain driving pitilessly down the glen where his confined and badly-built cottage is placed, rivers turned into

torrents, burns changed into rivers, and the grouse unapproachably wild, all combine to drive away many a southern sportsman before the end of this month; and yet October and November often are better months for grouse-shooting than the latter part of September.

Here in Morayshire we have a more favourable climate, and it is very rarely that there is any long continuance of bad weather in the lower parts of the county. Many a storm passes harmlessly over our heads to fall on the high grounds a few miles from the coast. These storms of rain or snow, although they pass over us, have always the effect of lowering the quicksilver in the weather-glass, as certainly as if they fell here, instead of only threatening to do so.

The earliest day on which I ever killed or saw widgeon in Morayshire was on the 8th of September, on which day I shot a brace, late in the evening, as they flew over my head on their way from the bay to some inland lake. They were both young birds. The flock altogether consisted of eight or nine. In the same year I killed a jack-snipe on the 16th, which is far earlier than these birds are usually seen (I have never yet ascertained that they breed in Britain), and during the next ten days I killed four others in nearly the same place, some of which were undoubtedly young birds. It may therefore be supposed that a chance pair may occasionally breed in the North, as it does not seem likely that those which I killed had been bred out of the kingdom. In no other year have I ever seen a jack-snipe before the 8th of October; even that is very early. I have made much inquiry on this subject in Sutherlandshire and in other likely localities; but have invariably found that where the jack-snipe has been supposed to have been seen during the breeding season, it has turned out to be the dunlin, or the common snipe. Neither their eggs nor young have ever been found, nor has the old bird been seen, for a certainty, in Britain during the summer season, excepting in the case of a single disabled bird.

The landrail is seldom seen here after the corn is cut, notwithstanding the great numbers which breed in the neighbourhood. It is peculiarly a summer bird; and although its cry is hoarse and inharmonious, I never hear it without pleasure, associated as it has become in my mind with the fine light nights of June and May. A fearless little bird it is, too, when caught uninjured. I have seen it

immediately after being made a prisoner, and while held in the hand, peck at and catch with wonderful rapidity and precision any flies that might pitch within its reach. Its manner of departure from this country would appear to be still unexplained, as it is never seen *en route* either by landmen or sailors. When this and other insectivorous birds leave us, winter visitors arrive. The turn-stone, a bird that breeds in Norway, arrives in this country at the first commencement of the month, but appears only to make it a temporary resting-place on its way to the south.

Like many other birds, the eagle sometimes exhibits great changes in the colour of his plumage. This year, during the month of September, I saw a freshly killed sea-eagle, whose colour was a fine silvery white, without the slightest mixture of brown. The bird was killed in Sutherlandshire; and I was informed that another eagle had been seen in its company with the same unusual plumage. The bird had quite arrived at maturity, but did not appear to be a very old one. Partridges, pheasants, grouse, and many small birds occasionally appear in a snow-white dress; but the birds of prey seldom change their colour. A black swan we read of as an example of a "*rara avis*;" what must then a white crow have been thought of by the augurs and omen-seekers among the ancients. Yet rooks and jackdaws, both parti-coloured and white, are by no means so uncommon with us as to be looked on as wonders.

This white eagle had been probably bred on some of the wild rocky headlands of the north coast of Sutherlandshire, where not even the value of the eggs can at all times induce the shepherds of the neighbourhood to attempt their capture. The sea-eagle is, in its habits, a sluggish, vulture-like bird, feeding chiefly on the dead fish and other animal substances which are cast up by the sea on these lonely and rugged shores, and seldom attacking the lambs of the farmer to the same extent as the golden eagle does. Although it is frequently seen, and its sharp bark-like cry is heard far inland, the usual hunting-ground of the sea-eagle is along the shore, where it can feed on its foul prey, undisturbed and unseen by human eye for months together. Like the golden eagle, this bird sometimes so gorges itself with food as to become helpless, and if then met with, may be knocked down by a stick, or captured alive before it can rise from the ground—a sad and ignoble fate for the king of birds! After

all, the eagle is but a sorry representative of royalty and kingly grandeur: for although his flight is noble and magnificent, and his strength and power astonishing, there is a cruelty and treachery about the disposition of the bird which render it unfit to be educated and trained like the peregrine and other falcons; nor does it ever become attached to its keeper.

On the 28th of September the last house-swallow took his departure from this neighbourhood, although the season was so fine that there were several nests of young greenfinches about the garden even so late as the 30th of the month, and a wood-pigeon was sitting on its eggs in an ash tree close to the house.

During the latter weeks of the fishing season (which legally ends on the 15th of September in all the northern rivers), the lower pools of the Findhorn are full of an excellent small sea-trout, locally called the finnock. My opinion is that the "finnock" is the grilse, or young of the common sea-trout, bearing exactly the same relation and affinity to that fish as the grilse does to the salmon; but the natural history of the inhabitants of another element is too uncertain and difficult a subject for a mere casual observer to enter upon. At any rate, the finnock is not only an excellent fish for the table, but affords capital sport, rising freely, and playing boldly when hooked; and has altogether strong attractions for those anglers who somewhat love their ease. I have been much amused by seeing an elderly, placid-looking London gentleman, who was staying at Forres for the purpose of fishing in the Findhorn. This old gentleman used to arrive at the river's edge at a comfortable noonday hour, accompanied by his lady, and a footman splendid in blue and red, who carried camp-stools, books, fishing-tackle, and last, though not least, a most voluminous luncheon. Daily did this party make their appearance at a certain pool, and while the old gentleman, seated at his ease on his camp-stool close to the water, with spectacles and broad-brimmed hat, fished away with the well-known perseverance and skill of a Thames angler, his lady read her book on one side, whilst on the other the red-legged footman either prepared the luncheon, or held in readiness the well-stocked fly-book of his master. Very different would be the description given of our Scotch fishing by one who thus practised the gentle craft of angling on the level grassy banks of the lower pools of the Findhorn, to that

of the sportsman who followed up the pursuit of the salmon over the rugged, and often dangerous, passes of the rocks which overhang the deep black pools and rushing torrents of the same river between Dulsie Bridge and the Heronry.

Most of the roebucks have, by the end of September, put on their winter covering of rich mouse-coloured hair; so different from the thin red coat they wear during the summer. Until they have quite changed colour, the roe are not in sufficiently good condition to make them a fit object of pursuit for the sportsman. The stag is, however, in perfection, both as to condition and beauty, during this month.

The size of the horns of the red deer depends to a certain degree on the feeding which the animal gets in the spring and end of winter. If his food has been poor, and if he is much reduced, the horns do not acquire their full development and size. Fine heads of horns are now much rarer than they were a few years ago. The reason of this probably is, that the stag before it attains a mature age generally falls a victim to one of the numerous English rifles, whose echoes are heard in almost every Highland corrie. Even where deer are most carefully preserved and most numerous, the finest antlers are generally laid low every season; so that there are few left whose heads are thought worthy of being kept as a trophy: yet small as they now comparatively are, the value of a stag seems to depend more on his horns than on his haunches.

I am much inclined to think that the uncertainty of getting a shot at deer in wood is even greater than on the open mountain, the cunning of the animals, and dislike to being driven in any one direction, frequently rendering abortive the best arranged plans for beating a cover. Sometimes the deer are off at the first sound of a beater, at another time they will lie quietly without moving till all the men have passed them, and will then sneak quietly back in the contrary direction.

I was this very year particularly struck with an instance of deer escaping in this manner. I was placed with a friend on passes commanding the extremity of a long narrow patch of cover which grew on a steep brae overhanging a beautiful river in Ross-shire; and the beaters were to commence their work at the other extremity of the wood. We had taken our stations at a considerable height above the river, at the most likely pass for the deer to leave the wood by; there we

waited some time without seeing anything excepting an occasional blackcock or grey hen, which, having been disturbed by the beaters at the other end of the cover, came skimming rapidly past us. Presently we perceived far below us four brown forms walking slowly through the high fern and herbage which grew amongst the birch trees. As they emerged from the cover we saw that they were three hinds and a calf. With uncertain pace they went on, sometimes trotting in a line, and sometimes standing in a group on some hillock from which they looked back earnestly and inquiringly into the wood. I was convinced by their manner that there were other deer, probably stags, still in the cover. As, however, the sound of the beaters came nearer, the four deer gradually mended their pace, and in a quiet canter followed the devious track which led them to the summit of a steep hill to our right hand. It was interesting to see how, having once made up their mind as to their route, they went steadily and rapidly on in single file, winding up the face of the hill, sometimes lost to our sight behind a cluster of rocks, or a birch-covered hillock, and again appearing as they kept deliberately on their way. At the very ridge of the hill they halted again, and after standing in a confused group with their heads all together, and their long ears at full stretch, they at once disappeared from our sight.

The beaters came closer and closer to us, and in spite of my prognostications no more deer appeared. At last the men issued out of the wood at the point nearest us; and one of them came up towards where we were, to call us down. A drizzly shower had commenced, and we had put the gun-covers on our rifles, when suddenly from under a single birch tree, which was about fifty yards from us, and about the same distance from the beater, rose a magnificent stag, in the finest condition, and with "a head of ten." Before we could get out our rifles he was behind a rise in the ground which concealed him from us until he was too far for a ball to reach him; and then he again appeared galloping heavily off for the same point at which the hinds had crossed the hill. We were both of us dumb with surprise and vexation; but not so the Highlander below us, who, in the most frantic state of eagerness and rage, halloed and vociferated in Gaelic and English, for the stag passed, with broadside on, within forty yards of him. Without moving from our position we watched the animal for some time; then, returning our rifles

to their waterproof cases, we, as if by a common impulse, lit the pipe of consolation in the shape of a cigar. Whilst so employed, with our heads bent from the cold misty blast, we again heard the man below us, shouting more frantically than before, and looking up we were just in time to see him fling his stick at another stag, who had risen from the same spot and had cantered away in a contrary direction, passing almost close to the beater. Like the first stag, too, he managed to keep his great body out of our view as long as was within shot, although he almost ran round the man, as if perfectly understanding the difference between two double-barrelled rifles and one walking-stick. We afterwards ascertained that the two deer had been lying in a small hollow ground at the foot of a single birch tree, which stood a little in advance of the main wood. They must have been lying with their heads close to the ground, hoping to escape being seen; and there they remained until they perceived that the beater as well as ourselves were walking directly towards them.

In taking up a position near a wood which the men are about to beat for deer and roe, the sportsman should go as cautiously and quietly as if he was stalking a deer on the open hill, as nothing will drive either stag or buck near a spot where he has discovered or suspected that any concealed danger is awaiting him: rather than do so, he will pass within reach of the sticks of the beaters, having, like human beings, a far greater dread of an unknown danger than of one which he sees, and knows the full extent of; and like many people taking "*omne ignotum pro horribili*."

Though red deer seldom come down to the woods in this immediate neighbourhood, I have occasionally seen one who has probably wandered away from the Duke of Richmond's forest.

Instances, too, sometimes occur of a stag being found in the act of swimming narrow parts of the Moray Firth; a solitary deer who probably has been driven by dogs from his usual haunts, till frightened and bewildered he has wandered at random, and at last, coming to the shore, has swam boldly out attracted by the appearance of the woods on the opposite side.

CHAPTER XXI.

OCTOBER.—PART I.

Migration of Birds—Quails—Arrival of Wild Geese—White-fronted Geese—Arrival of Wild Swans; decrease of—Feastings of our Ancestors—Food of Ducks, &c.—Field-mice—Roe feeding—Hawks—Peregrine and Wild Duck—Training of Hawks—Migration of Eagles.

OCTOBER is, in this country, one of the finest months of the whole year. The cold cutting winds of November are frequently preceded by bright, clear, sunshiny weather, most enjoyable and invigorating to all whose avocations and amusements keep them much in the open air. The birds, both migratory and stationary, begin now to establish themselves in their winter quarters; and scarcely a day passes which is not marked by the arrival or departure, or the winter preparations of some of the feathered races in this country.

On the 4th of October, during the mild season of 1847, I found a pair of young wood-pigeons in a nest near the house. A few day afterwards they were both dead, either from the old birds having been killed, or from the coldness of one or two of the succeeding days. The latest landrail that I killed was on the 6th, and a fatter bird of any description I never saw.

Three or four quails were killed at the beginning of October, in the eastern part of the county. During the month of May I constantly heard the call of the old birds close to my house; and we saw them several times basking in the sun on one of the gravel walks.

On the 11th and 12th large flocks of wild geese passed to the south. There was at the time a considerable sprinkling of snow on the Ross-shire and Sutherlandshire mountains. None of the grey or bean-geese seemed to alight anywhere in this neighbourhood during the autumn; but a flock of that very beautiful species, the white-fronted goose, took up their quarters about the fresh-water lakes. Being anxious to procure one of these birds, I went the following day to look for them. It is a long, tedious walk through the wild, desolate country which bounds the sand-hills to the westward, and separates them from the lochs and swamps which the swans and geese frequent when in this region. After a long search for the birds, a sudden gleam of sunshine showed us their yellow bills and white foreheads conspicuously above

the rough grass and herbage of the swamp in which they were feeding. They did not appear to have taken any alarm at us; so putting myself under the guidance of my old keeper, who seemed to have a perfect knowledge of every ditch and hollow of the ground by which an approach could be made, I crawled and wormed myself along to within sixty or seventy yards of five of the birds. To get any nearer, unseen, was impossible; raising my head, and trusting to Eley's cartridges and No. 3 shot, I fired and killed a brace of these very beautiful birds; a third fell, but rose again, and recovered himself.

The white-fronted geese remained in or near the same district, with only occasional absences, during the whole winter, and until the month of April; their habits in this respect being very unlike those of the bean-geese, who in this region are never stationary for above a few days. The white-fronted goose is the handsomest species, both as to form and plumage, that we ever see in Scotland. The full-grown birds are distinctly and beautifully marked with black bands on the breast, and have a pure white spot on the front of their head. They are of a compact, firm shape, and walk with great activity and lightness while feeding. Unlike the bean-goose, they frequently feed in pools and swamps where some favourite plant grows; and in situations which the sportsman can easily approach, sometimes close to furze or other cover. The other kinds of geese never by any chance commit themselves in the same manner, but always feed and rest in the most open situations, where it is almost impossible to approach them unseen. The white-fronted goose has much more the form and appearance of the common tame goose than the bean-goose. In this respect, as well as in the peculiar shape of the head and bill, it exactly resembles the grey lag.

A single very large wild swan appeared on the lakes on the 18th of October, and on the 20th he was joined by two more. The wild swans, on their first arrival, almost always fly into the bay from the south, coming in flocks of one hundred to two hundred together. The only way I can account for this, knowing that they must of necessity have wended their way from the north, is, by supposing that they first alight on some of the mountain lakes between Findhorn and Strathspey. A large flight of these noble birds, as they circle round the fresh-water lakes on their first arrival, is one of the most

beautiful sights imaginable. There is, too, a wild harmony in their bugle-like cry, as they wheel round and round, now separating into small companies, as each family of five or six seems inclined to alight, and now all joining again in a long undulating line, waiting for the word of command from some old leader, whose long acquaintance with the country and its dangers constitutes him a swan of note among the common herd. At last this leader makes up his mind to alight, and in a few moments the whole flock are gradually sinking down on the calm loch. After a brief moment or two spent in looking round them, with straight and erect necks, they commence sipping the water, and turning their flexible necks into a thousand graceful curves and attitudes. They then break off into small companies, each apparently a separate family, and set to work, with seemingly a most excellent appetite, on the water-grasses and plants. I regret to say that the number of wild swans seems to decrease every year. Fewer and fewer visit this country, scared away, probably, by the yearly alteration made in their favourite haunts and feeding-grounds by draining and other improvements, which substitute oats for rushes, and sheep for wild fowl, an alteration by no means gladdening to the eyes of my old *garde-chasse*. The diminution in their numbers does not result from the quantity killed, which, comparatively speaking, is inconsiderable.

On their first arrival the swans are much less shy and wary than they are after a few weeks' experience and knowledge of the dangers which surround them. On these lochs, which are tolerably quiet, a flock generally remains during the whole winter. The feeding is good, and when anything disturbs them, the sands of the bay offer them a sure refuge. I seldom interfere with them, unless I happen to want one for any purpose; and in reward for this forbearance I have the pleasure of seeing them every day in nearly the same part of the water, either feeding on the plants or pluming themselves on the small banks and islands. Their favourite loch is, of course, the one least accessible to any enemy.

The flesh of the wild swan, at least of those who feed inland, is perfectly free from all strong and unpleasant flavour, their food consisting almost wholly of a kind of water-grass which has a bulbous root. In these lochs there is a good supply of this plant, and the swans become very fat, so much so as to make it exceedingly difficult to preserve the skins, the only part of them which I put to any use. When the

feathers are picked out, there remains on the skin a great thickness of very beautiful snow-white down, which, when properly dressed by a London furrier, makes boas and other articles of ladies' dress of unrivalled beauty.

Our omniverous ancestors appear to have been great eaters of swans. Amongst other dishes at a feast in the reign of Edward IV., mention is made of "*four hundred swans.*" Those said ancestors must have had marvellous capacious stomachs; for at the same feast there was the like number of herons, besides endless other little delicacies, such as "two thousand pigs;" the last entrées mentioned being "twelve porpoises and seals," these probably being reserved to the last as a *bonnebouche*. Truly, the tables must have groaned, *literally*, not *figuratively*, under the burden of the good things laid upon them.

The wild swans, on their first arrival, as I before remarked, are not nearly so wild as subsequent ill-treatment renders them, and I never found much difficulty in procuring a brace, or more, early in the season. Awaiting their arrival at a feeding-place is generally the surest way of getting a shot, or by waylaying them in their passage from one loch to another. On a windy day I have got at them, where the situation has been favourable, by dint of creeping up through bog and ditch. In rough weather they are not so ready to take wing, and with good management may be driven from one end of a loch to the other without quitting the water.

October is the month when the greatest number of widgeon arrive in the bay; and the mallards, also, keep up a constant quacking and calling on the sands. Every evening at sunset, or soon afterwards, the latter birds fly to the stubble fields, preferring those where there is the least quantity of grass to cover the scattered grains. The water-ousels now come down to the burns near the sea; and these merry little birds resort to the very same stones year after year. They appear to be regular attendants on the small streams and burns where the trout spawn.

Immediately on the retiring of a flood in the river, great numbers of snipes are seen on the mud and refuse left by the water, feeding busily. Where they come from is difficult to say, as at this season, except on these occasions, we have no great abundance of these birds. Redshanks, in considerable flocks, follow their example. On the 16th I see redwings in the hedges; fieldfares do not appear until ten days afterwards.

The woodpigeons now fly considerable distances to feed on acorns. In the south of England I have killed wild ducks with their crops nearly bursting with the quantity of acorns they had swallowed. They collect them from the single oak trees standing in grass fields,

From the variety of food found in the crops of wild ducks it is evident that these birds must wander far and near, during the night, and often into places where no one would expect to find them. Though the peewits generally leave us early in October, a flock is sometimes seen at the end of the month. The golden plovers collect in great crowds on the banks of the river to enjoy the morning sun. They are now in excellent condition.

The proceedings of the common long-tailed field-mouse are amusing, and indicate the care with which these little animals provide against the cold and scarcity of the winter. They dig deep holes in the stubble-fields, in which they collect large stores of food, such as grain, acorns, nuts, and even cherry-stones. On the approach of cold winds or rain they shut themselves up in their underground habitations, closing the aperture completely. The quantity of earth which they dig out and leave at the mouth of their hole in a single night is quite astonishing. At the instigation of the gardener my boys wage war against these little animals. By pouring water into the holes the poor mouse is obliged, *nolens volens*, to bolt like a rabbit driven out by a ferret.

Late in the afternoon I constantly see the roe feeding on those clover fields where there is sufficient second growth to attract them. Nothing can be more graceful than the light and agile movements of this animal while nibbling the tender shoots of the bushes or trees on which it feeds. The wild rose and the bramble are amongst its favourite morsels: from the long twigs of these plants it nibbles off leaf by leaf in the most graceful manner imaginable. As the leaves fall from the birch and oak woods the roe quit them, and take to the fir plantations, where they have more quiet and shelter. The foresters accuse these animals of being very destructive to their young oak trees; and fond as I am of them, I am afraid I must admit the accusation is just, as they undoubtedly prefer the topmost shoot of a young oak-tree to almost any other food. Nevertheless, the mischief done to the woods by roe is but trifling when compared to that done by rabbits. Many an acre is obliged to be replanted owing to their

destructive nibbling and in some of the beautiful woods of Brodie I saw the fine holly-trees of many years' growth, with stems of six inches in diameter, perfectly killed by being barked by rabbits.

Most of the hill-bred hawks, such as hen-harriers, merlins, peregrines, &c., come down now to hunt the fields, which are clear of corn, and also to feed on the plovers, &c., which frequent the shore. I sometimes see the peregrine in pursuit of wild ducks; and one day I observed a hawk of this kind give chase to an old mallard. The pursuit was rather curious, reversing the usual order of things, as the falcon's great object was to keep below the mallard instead of above him; the latter endeavouring all he could to get to the water, in which case he knew, as the hawk did also, that his chance of escape would be the greatest. Once in the water, his own element, by diving and swimming he would soon have baffled his pursuer. I don't know what was the end of the chase; the last I saw of them they were winging their rapid flight straight across the sea for the opposite coast of Ross-shire. Either the hawk was not willing to strike his prey while over the water, or the mallard had a vigour of wing which enabled him to keep ahead of his murderous enemy.

My tame peregrine, after some years spent in perfect friendship and alliance with our pet owl, ended in killing and eating her; a piece of ungenerous barbarism which I should not have suspected so fine a bird would have committed. They seemed to have quarrelled over the remains of some bird that was given them. At anyrate all that remained of the poor owl was a leg or two and some of the longer feathers.

The country in its present enclosed state is not so well adapted to the sport of hawking as formerly; but, as far as relates to the training of the birds, the process is much more simple and easy than is generally supposed. Of course the trainer must take in hand a bird of the proper kind, such as a peregrine, a merlin, or an Iceland or ger falcon. A goshawk is tractable enough; but has not the same dash and rapid flight as any of the true long-winged falcons.

The first step is to accustom your bird to the hood, without which you can do nothing; but most hawks allow themselves to be hooded quietly enough, and are then to a great degree under your command, as when hooded you can carry her when and where you like on your hand, and familiarise her to your voice and to being handled.

The next step is to accustom the hawk to feed on the lure, and *only* on the lure, so as to fly directly to it whenever she sees it: indeed, the lure ought only to be shown when the bird is to feed.

These two points gained, you must proceed to flying the hawk in an open field, substituting a long silken string, or "creance," for the short leathern strap, the "leash," by which you always hold her. By taking her out hungry, and by showing her, when mounted in the air, the lure with food attached to it, you will find that she will swoop at once down to her usual feeding-place, which, as I have said, should be the "lure" only.

After doing this two or three days, if the hawk appears tractable, and not at all shy and wild, take her out when very hungry, and let her mount without any "creance;" and when she is well up in the air, toss down the lure, which until then should be concealed, and ten to one but the hawk will immediately come down upon it with the rapidity of an arrow; and a more beautiful sight than the swoop of a hawk from a great height I do not know.

To make her kill her game, you must at first let her fly at a pigeon, or other bird, with its wings partially cut, so as to ensure the hawk against failure at the commencement. After she has killed two or three birds in this way, she will probably kill any bird you may fly her at in a favourable country. But in this fine old sport the mere killing the game is almost a minor consideration. The flight, the soaring, and the rapid detection of, and descent upon, the lure, are in themselves most interesting and beautiful.

I am not sufficiently skilled in the science, even if I had time and space, to attempt technically to describe or make others understand all that is required to constitute an accomplished falconer. The moulting of the falcons, their keeping, feeding and training, must all be perfectly understood and carefully attended to; and although almost any person who has his time at his command may manage to keep a single hawk in good training and obedience, yet to carry out the amusement to any degree of perfection, a professed and skilful falconer must be engaged, whose sole and entire employment should be to attend to the health and education of the birds.

The training of falcons is much facilitated by the natural disposition of the bird, which is bold, confiding, and fearless;

and these qualifications, assisted by the keen sense of hunger felt by all animals of prey, render their taming and education far more easy than would at first be supposed.

Next to the peregrine the merlin is the best hawk to train, being equally bold and fearless; and, although of so small a size, has courage enough to dash fearlessly when launched from the hand at whatever bird it may see on wing. A merlin belonging to a friend of mine would fiercely assail a blackcock. This hawk, too, is so beautiful and so finely formed, that a prettier pet cannot be found; and when once a hawk is accustomed to the hood, the trouble of keeping her is very little.

The goshawk, although a fine handsome bird, has not the speed of any of the long-winged hawks, but she flies well at rabbits. I am told that the instantaneous manner in which this hawk kills a rabbit, by breaking its skull at a single blow, can only be understood by those who have seen it.

But I am wandering into a subject of which I know too little from personal experience to render my remarks of any value; and will only recommend those of my readers who possess time and energy to procure a peregrine falcon in good health and perfect plumage (the latter point is most important), and then, with some treatise on hawking in one hand, try if he cannot soon train the hawk which sits hooded on his other. With a fair share of temper, patience, and careful observation, he will be sure to succeed.

The goshawk is the most rare kind in this country. The only place where I know of its breeding regularly is the forest of Darnaway; but I am told that they also breed in the large fir woods near the Spey. The bright piercing eye of the goshawk has a peculiarly savage and cruel expression, without the fine bold open look of the peregrine. At this season that singular hawk, the osprey, is sometimes seen soaring, with its kestrel-like flight, along the course of the river. I occasionally see one hovering over the lower pools; but, in general, this bird is seen only *in transitu* from one side of the country to the other. The golden eagle, too, passes on his way at this season from north to south, frequently attended by a rabble rout of grey crows, who, when they have pursued the kingly bird for a certain distance, give up the chase, which is immediately taken up by a fresh band, who in their turn pass him over to new assailants. It would appear that each set follows him as

long as he is within what seems their own especial district, like country constables passing on a sturdy vagrant from one parish to another.

CHAPTER XXII.

OCTOBER.—PART II.

A SEA-SIDE WALK IN OCTOBER.

Beauty of a fine October morning—Departure and arrival of Birds—A walk along the Coast—The Goosander—Golden Eye and Morillion—Plovers—Widgeon; habits of in Feeding; occasionally bred in Scotland—Sands of the Bay—Flounders—Heron—Curlews, Peewits, &c.—Oyster-birds—Mussels—Scarps—Sea View—Longtails—Mallards—Velvet Ducks; mode of Feeding—Rabbits and Foxes—Formation of the Sand Hills; remains of Antiquity found in them—Seals—Salmon-fishers—Old Man catching Founders—Swans—Unauthorized Fox-chase—Black Game—Roe.

CHARMING to every sense is the first return of Spring: but quite as enjoyable is a fine dry Autumn day, and far more invigorating is the first frosty morning than the breath of the most balmy spring breeze that ever gave life to bird or butterfly. In this part of the island, too, Spring is at best but a capricious and uncertain beauty, and in the course of four-and-twenty hours one is burnt by an almost tropical sun, and cut in twain by an east wind which seems to have been born and bred in the heart of an iceberg.

Not so in Autumn, or at any rate during the early part of it. In October, the equinox being tolerably well over, and the more severe frosts of winter not yet set in, nothing can exceed the exhilarating feeling which comes with every breeze. How beautiful is the rising of the sun;—bright and red, it casts a splendour of colour, in every gradation of light and shade, in the rugged mountains of the west, whose summits already capped with snow have the hue and refulgence of enormous opals: the sun, too, rises at a proper gentleman-like hour, so as to give every one a chance of admiring him on his first appearance, instead of hurrying into existence too early for most of the world to witness his young beauties.

From my earliest days I rejoiced more in Autumn than in any other season. "Pomifer Autumnus" calls forth in the schoolboy's mind a remembrance of apples and fruit, ripe and ruddy. In later years Autumn (and October is undoubtedly the prime month of that season) fills us with thankfulness for the abundance and variety of the productions of the earth.

As I wander in the wilds and the woods, by river and glade, on every side the changing foliage of the different trees displays an endless variety of beautiful colours. Every thicket and grove has its rich mixture of emerald green, bright brown, and different shades of gold and red.

Every day, too, has its interest in the eyes of the dweller on this coast, for the arrivals and departures of different birds are unintermitting. An infinite variety of wild fowl come over from the north and north-east, while our summer visitants, such as the landrail, cuckoo, swallow, and most of the insect-eating birds, disappear. One of my most favourite walks is along the coast, beginning at the mouth of the river and following the shores of the bay till I reach the open firth; then after continuing along the beach for three or four miles, I return through the wild uncultivated ground which divides the sea-shore from the arable lands. At this season the variety of birds which are to be seen in the course of this walk is astonishing. Starting from home soon after sunrise, with a biscuit in my pocket, my gun or rifle on my arm, and my constant canine companion with me, I am independent for the day. Bright and bracing is the autumn morning; the robin sings joyously and fearlessly from the topmost twig of some rosebush, as I pass through the garden, while the thrushes and blackbirds are busily employed in turning up the leaves which already begin to strew the walks as they search in conscious security for the grey snails, repaying in kind for the strawberries and cherries they have robbed us of; and welcome are they to their share of fruit in the season of plenty.

The partridges as I pass through the field seem aware that I am not bent on slaughter, but on a quiet walk of observation; and instead of rising and flying off as I pass them, simply lower their heads till I am beyond them, and then begin feeding again on the stubbles.

From the pools at the end of the river a brace or two of teal and snipes, or perhaps of mallards, rise, and probably one or two are bagged, as I make no scruple of shooting these birds of passage when they give me an opportunity.

Looking quietly over the bank of the river, I see a couple of goosanders fishing busily at the tail of a pool. They are not worth eating, and I do not just now want a specimen; so after watching them for a short time, as they fish for small trout, I walk on, leaving them unmolested. If, how-

ever, I show any portion of my figure above the bank, their quick eye detects me, and after gazing for half a minute with erect neck, they fly off; at first flapping the surface of the water, or almost running along it; and then gradually rising, wend their way to a few pools higher up the river, where alighting they re-commence their fishing.

The golden-eye duck and the morillon also are frequently seen diving for shell-fish and weed in the deep quiet pools, but never fishing in the shallow parts of the river like the goosander.

The peewits do not leave us till quite the end of October, and during most of the month are in immense numbers on the sands near the mouth of the river. In the dusk of the evening they as well as the golden plover leave the sands, and take to the fields in search of worms and snails, generally frequenting the ploughed land or the grass-fields. As I pass along the shore of the bay, large flocks of widgeon fly to and fro as the ebb-tide leaves uncovered the small grassy island and banks. Unlike the mallard and teal, both which are night-feeding birds, the widgeon feeds at any hour of the day or night indiscriminately, not waiting for the dusk to commence their search for food, but grazing like geese on the grass whenever they can get at it. Although towards the end of winter the shyest of all waterfowl, the widgeon, at this season, owing to their not having been persecuted and fired at, may be easily approached, and with a little care may be closely watched as they swim to and fro from bank to bank; sometimes landing, and at other times cropping the grass as they swim along the edge. If a pair of mallards is amongst the flock, the drake's green head is soon seen to rise up above the rest, as his watchfulness is seldom long deceived; with low quacking he warns his mate, and the two then rise, giving an alarm to the widgeon. The latter, after one or two rapid wheels in the air, return to their feeding-ground, but the mallards fly off to a considerable distance before they stop. 'Tis as well to make the widgeon pay tribute, so creeping to the nearest part of the bank I wait till a flock has approached within shot and in close rank, and giving them both barrels, four or five drop. If any are winged, my dog has a tolerably hard chase; for no bird dives more quickly than the widgeon: and they invariably make directly for the deep water, taking long dives, and only showing the top of their head when they are obliged to come up to breathe.

Both male and female have the same sober plumage at this season; nor are the drakes in full beauty till January. I shot a brace of widgeon on the 8th of September this year, which is a month before their usual time of arrival. A flock of eight passed over my head, nearly a quarter of a mile from the sea, and I killed two of them—one apparently a young, and the other an old bird. I am inclined to think that they had been hatched in this part of the country. Although they leave us regularly in the spring, I have been told by an old poacher that he has no doubt a pair or two, probably wounded birds, remain about some of the unfrequented lochs and breed, as he says he has occasionally seen widgeon in summer in one or two places in the neighbourhood; but that is rare. As my informant has a *very accurate* acquaintance with most birds, I believe his account to be correct. The widgeon that I saw on the 8th of September had very much the appearance of a brood which had been hatched near at hand; one of the birds not having arrived at that fulness and hardness of plumage that would enable it to have made a long aerial voyage. In Sutherland they breed every year.

I have a long walk before me, and bright as an October day is, the sun does not give us many hours of his company, but seems to be in a great hurry to hide his glorious head behind the snowy peaks of Inverness-shire.

In crossing the sands of the bay in order to arrive at the neck of sandy ground that divides it from the main sea, there are many runs of water to be waded, some caused by the river itself, which branches out into numerous small streams which intersect the sands, and some made by two good-sized brooks which empty themselves into the bay. In all these streams there are innumerable flounders, large and small, which dart as quick as lightning from under your feet. Their chief motive power seems to lie in their broad tails, with which they propel themselves along at a wonderful rate; then suddenly stopping, they in an instant bury themselves in the sand; and it is only a very sharp eye that can detect the exact spot where they are by observing their outline faintly marked on the sand in which they are ensconced: sometimes also their two prominent eyes may be discovered in addition to their outline.

It is a favourite amusement with my boys in the summer to hunt and spear the flounders which remain at low water in the pools and runs of water in the bay. On a calm day,

by wading to where the water is a foot or two in depth, they kill, with the assistance of a long light spear, a basketful of good-sized fish.

When a flounder is taken out of the water and laid on the moist sands, by a peculiar lateral motion of his fins he buries himself as quickly as if still in his own element.

The large gulls keep up a system of surveillance over all the calm pools at low water, hovering over them, and pouncing down like hawks on any fish which may be left in them. As the tide ebbs, numbers of herons, also, come down to the water's edge, and keeping up step by step with the receding tide, watch for any fish or marine animal that may suit their appetite. It is amusing to observe these birds as they stride slowly and deliberately in knee-deep water, with necks outstretched, intent on their prey, their grey shadowy figures looking more like withered sticks than living creatures.

As for curlews, peewits, sand-pipers, et id genus omne, their numbers in the bay are countless. Regularly as the tide begins to ebb do thousands of these birds leave the higher banks of sand and shingle on which they have been resting, and betake themselves to the wet sands in search of their food: and immense must be the supply which every tide throws up, or leaves exposed, to afford provision to them all. Small shell-fish, shrimps, sea-worms, and other insects form this wondrous abundance. Every bird, too, out of those countless flocks is not only in good order, but is covered with fat, showing how well the supply is proportioned to the demand: indeed in the case of all wild birds it is observable that they are invariably plump and well-conditioned, unless prevented by some wound or injury from foraging for themselves.

On the mussel scarps are immense flocks of oyster-catchers, brilliant with their black and white plumage and bright-red bill, and a truly formidable weapon must that bill be to mussel or cockle; it is long and powerful, with a sharp point as hard as ivory, which driven in by the full strength of the bird's head and neck, must penetrate like a wedge into the shell of the strongest shell-fish found on these shores.

Beautiful, surpassingly beautiful, is the view before me, as I rest myself on a height of the sand-hills facing towards the north. The bright and calm sea close at hand, and the variously-shaped and variously-coloured cliffs and rocks of

Cromarty and Ross-shire, at a distance in reality of twelve or fifteen miles, but which, as the sun shines full upon them, appear to be very much nearer, and all these are backed by mountains of every form and outline, but of a uniform deep blue tipped with white peaks. The sea as smooth as a mirror except where some sea-fowl suddenly splashes down into the water, making a few silvery circles, which soon disappear. Every here and there is a small flock of the long-tailed duck, diving and sporting in the sea, and uttering their strange but musical cry as they chase each other, swimming rapidly in small circles or taking short flights close above the surface; the whole flock dropping all at once into the water as if shot, not alighting gradually like the mallard and other ducks.

The heavy but handsome velvet ducks ride quietly on the sea in small companies, at the distance of about two hundred yards from the shore, apparently keeping over some ridge of sand or other feeding-ground, down to which they are continually diving. These birds drift along with the tide till it has carried them beyond the place where they feed; then they rise, and fly back for some distance, looking more like blackcocks than ducks, and dropping again into the water, they continue their diving till the tide has drifted them beyond the end of the feeding-ground; and this they do again and again.

The rabbits which inhabit these sand-hills are certainly larger and heavier than those living in the more cultivated country, though their food must consist almost entirely of dry bent, with the variety of a little sea-weed and the furze bushes, which they eat into numerous shapes, like footstools, ottomans, &c.

Foxes almost as tall and powerful as greyhounds frequent this region; and their fresh tracks are seen after every tide close to the sea-shore, whither they have been in search of cast-up fish, wounded wild fowl, and such like.

I never pass over these sand-hills without endeavouring to suggest to myself some new theory respecting their origin, and what was the state of the country which they now cover over. That beneath the accumulation of sand there has once been a range of fertile fields cannot be doubted, as in different places are seen furrows and other well-defined traces of cultivated land; yet no account exists of the destruction of these fields by the inroad of the sand;

evidently the change was accomplished suddenly. In many parts of this sandy region there are distinct marks of rushing waters; ridges of both sand and shingle are cast up in a manner which could only have been effected by some tremendous rush of water; and strange pyramids of stones also are heaped up in several places, to all appearance by the same agency.

Few remains of antiquity have ever been found here; indeed, it is rarely these sands are trodden by any foot save that of some poacher in search of rabbits. I have, however, seen a most curious bracelet-like ornament which was found here. It is made of fine bronze, in the shape of a snake, which, it has been supposed, had a head at each extremity, formed of some precious stone: these, however, are lost, the fastenings having corroded. In shape this relic appeared to me to resemble one of the bands which bound together the fasces carried by a Roman lictor. On further examination it has, I believe, been ascertained that the bronze must have encircled some ornament or weapon of wood, which has rotted away, leaving nothing but the more durable metal.

It has twice happened to me to find human skeletons, or rather the remains of skeletons, lying on the sand, laid bare by some drifting wind, or half disinterred by the subterraneous proceedings of the rabbits. In both cases the remains were evidently of great antiquity, but had been preserved by the dry sand.

Those curiously carved pieces of flint called elf-arrows are not uncommon in some parts of the sand-hills.

On one part of the sands, which forms a peninsula at low water, but an island when it is high, I perhaps discover two or three seals lying. Clumsy-looking as they are, at the slightest alarm they scuffle off with great rapidity into the water. Once there they feel secure, and rising at a short distance from the shore, they take a good look at the intruder on their domain. Ugly and misshapen as a seal appears on land, he is when in the water by no means an unsightly-looking animal; and he floats and dives with a quiet rapidity which appears marvellous to the looker-on. You see a seal's head appear above the water; and you sit down half concealed, with ready rifle, to wait his reappearance. In a minute or two you are suddenly startled by its rising quietly in quite a different direction; and after gazing intently at you for a few moments with its dark, mild-looking eyes, the

sleek, shining head disappears again below the surface without making a ripple on the water, just as you have screwed yourself round, and are about to touch the trigger of your rifle, leaving you almost in doubt as to whether it is a seal or a mermaid. The Highlanders, however, are by no means prepossessed in favour of the good looks of a seal, or "sealgh," as they pronounce the word. "You are nothing but a sealgh" is a term of reproach which, when given by one fishwoman to another, is considered the direct insult, and a climax to every known term of abuse.

It is curious to observe the seals resting on some shallow, with only their heads above the water, and their noses elongated into a proboscis-like shape. They will frequently lie in this manner for hours together, until the return of the tide either floats them off their resting-place, or some other cause induces them to shift their quarters. The greatest drawback in most localities to shooting seals is the difficulty of getting the animal when killed. Tenacious of life to a surprising degree, a seal, unless shot through the head, escapes to the water, however severely wounded he may be, and, sinking to the bottom, is lost to the sportsman. When shot through the head, he struggles for perhaps a minute on the surface, and then sinks like a stone to the bottom. A strong courageous retriever sometimes succeeds in towing a dead seal ashore, if he can reach him before he sinks, and has the good luck or judgment to take hold of one of the animal's feet, or "flippers," the only part which the dog can get into his mouth.

A seal has a very acute scent, and can never be approached from the windward. I conceive that their eyesight is less perfect; at any rate they are endowed with a certain dangerous curiosity which makes them anxious to approach and reconnoitre any object which they may have seen at a little distance, and do not quite understand. I have seen a seal swim up to within twenty yards of a dog on the shore, for the purpose apparently of examining him, as some unknown animal. Music, too, or any uncommon or loud noise attracts them; and they will follow for a considerable distance the course of a boat in which any loud musical instrument is played, putting up their heads, and listening with great eagerness to the unknown strains. I have even seen them approach boldly to the shore, where a bagpiper was playing, and continue to swim off and on at a hundred yards' distance.

Notwithstanding their wariness and the difficulty of capturing them, seals are gradually diminishing in number, and will soon disappear from our coasts. This is owing chiefly to the constant warfare carried on against them by the salmon fishers, who either destroy them or frighten them away as far as they can from their fishing stations.

On the neck of land at which we have now arrived there is a hut inhabited during the season by a couple of salmon fishers, whose business it is to attend to the stake-net, which stretches out from near their hut into the sea. A lonely life these men must lead, from March to September, varied only by visits from or to their comrades, who are stationed at the depôt of ice at Findhorn, where all the fish caught are sent to be kept till a sufficient quantity is ready to load one of their quick-sailing vessels for London. But if their life is lonely it is not idle, as the exposed situation of their nets renders them liable to constant injury from wind and sea. At every low tide the men scramble and wade to the end or trap part of the net to take out the fish which have been caught, and to scrape off the net the quantity of sea-weed that has adhered to it, during the last tide. Although they do not always find salmon, they are seldom so unlucky as not to catch a number of goodly-sized flounders, which fall to the share of the fishermen themselves; and perhaps once or twice in the season a young seal gets entangled and puzzled in the windings of the net, and is drowned in it. More frequently, however, the twine is damaged and torn by the larger seals, who are too strong and cunning to be so easily caught.

Frequently on this barren peninsula I have fallen in with a small colony of field-mice. They are in shape like the common large-headed and short-tailed mouse, which is so destructive in gardens, but of a brighter and lighter colour. These little animals must live on the seeds of the bent and on such dead fish as they may fall in with.

The brent goose is not a constant visitor here in the winter. This bird, though very numerous in the Cromarty Firth, does not find in this part of the coast the particular kind of sea-grass on which it feeds. There are generally, however, a small company of these geese about the basin. A few white-fronted geese are constantly here from October to April or May, living either in the lonely mosses near the sea, or about the sands. Of other wild geese we have no large

flocks, except during the time of sowing the oats, when bean-geese arrive in great numbers.

This bay, like that of Findhorn, is always swarming with *waders* of every description, from the curlew to the redshank, and from the smallest kind of sandpiper to the old man we see yonder, who is wading mid-leg deep in the tide, keeping even pace with the water as it flows in to fill the basin. His occupation was for some time a mystery to me, till approaching him, I saw that he had a singular kind of creel slung to his neck, and a long, clumsy-looking kind of trident in his hand. Walking slowly backwards, but still keeping in two-foot water, with poised weapon and steady eye, he watches for the flounders which come in with every tide. When he sees one, down goes his spear; and the unlucky fish is hoisted into the air, and then deposited in the creel.

I waited until, having either filled his basket or being driven to land by the increased depth of the tide, the old man quitted the water. He either had not noticed me or did not choose to do so before he landed. When I accosted him by asking him what luck he had had, I got at first rather a grunt than an answer, as he seemed in no very communicative mood; but having refreshed himself by a spoonful of snuff, which he crammed into his nose with a little wooden kind of ladle, he told me that he "had na get muckle *vennison* the morn," adding that he "did na ken what had driven the *beasts* out of the bay of late;" venison, or, as he pronounced it, "ven-mi-son," meaning in this country any eatable creature, fish, flesh, or fowl. The old fellow seemed of a most bilious and irritable temperament; and I believe had I not won him over by dint of whisky and fair words, he would have laid his bad success in flounder catching to my shooting wild fowl in the bay. As it was, he gradually became tolerably gracious, and told me many marvellous stories of the good old time, when salmon fishers were fewer and seals more plentiful; so much so, that, according to his account, every tide left numbers of these now rare animals in the pools of water in the bay; and a "puir man wha wanted a drop oil or bit seal-skin had only to go down at low water to the pools, and he could get a sealgh as sune as I can get a fluke in these days." Since this colloquy I and the old flounder fisher have always been on tolerable terms.

The sea in this bay, as well as in other similar ones on the coast, runs in so rapidly that without keeping a good look-

out, there is a chance of being surrounded by the water, and detained till an hour or two after the tide begins to ebb again, which in these short autumn days would be inconvenient, as I am now at least six miles from home; a great part of which distance is over the roughest piece of moss and heather that I know; full, too, of concealed holes, treacherously covered over with vegetation.

The first flock of swans which I have seen this season are just arriving in a long, undulating line. As they come over the sands where they will probably rest for the night, the whole company sets up a simultaneous concert of trumpet-like cries; and after one or two wheels round the place, light down on the sand, and immediately commence pluming themselves and putting their feathers in order, after their long and weary flight from the wild morasses of the north. After a short dressing of feathers and resting a few minutes, the whole beautiful flock stretch their wings again, and rise gradually into the air, but to no great height, their pinions sounding loud as they flap along the shallow water before getting well on wing. They then fly off, led by instinct or the experience of former years, to where a small stream runs into the bay, and where its waters have not yet mingled with the salt sea. Here they alight, and drink and splash about to their hearts' content. This done, they waddle out of the stream, and after a little stretching of wings and arranging of plumage, standing in a long row, dispose themselves to rest, every bird with her head and long neck laid on her back, with the exception of one unfortunate individual, who by a well-understood arrangement stands with erect neck and watchful eye to guard his sleeping companions. They have, however, a proper sense of justice, and relieve guard regularly, like a well-disciplined garrison. I would willingly disturb their rest with a charge of swan-shot, could I get within range, but not being able so to do, I must needs leave the noble-looking birds to rest in peace. When I get up from the place where I was sitting to watch them, the sentinel gives a low cry of alarm, which makes the whole rank lift their heads for a moment; but seeing that they are out of danger, and that instead of approaching them, I am walking in the contrary direction, they all dispose themselves again to rest, with the exception of their watchful sentry. In the morning, at daybreak, they will all be feeding in the shallow lakes in the neighbourhood, led there by some old

bird who has made more than one journey to this country before now. Wistfully my dog watches the snow-white flock; but the evening is coming on, and we must leave them.

A desert of moss, heather, and stunted fir-trees, which takes an hour to walk through, affords little worthy of note, with the exception of that fine fellow of a fox who, as we pass on, surveys us from a hillock well out of reach. The grey crows flying and croaking over his head first called my attention to him. Nothing is to be seen now but the top of his head and the tips of his ears, as he lowers himself down gradually and quietly the moment he sees me look in his direction. But my dog has got the scent; and off he goes in a vain pursuit. Tractable and well-broken as he is with regard to game, no sooner does he perceive the inciting odour of a fox or otter, than, heedless of call or threat, he is off in pursuit. Look now! away goes the fox at a quick but easy gallop, through the swamp with his tail (*Anglicè* brush) well up in the air. A fox is always a great dandy about his brush; and keeps it free from wet and dirt as long as he possibly can: a sure sign of poor Reynard beginning to feel distressed is his brush appearing soiled and blackened. Ah! the dog has got on his scent again, and begins to press hard on his hated foe; but as I well know he has not the slightest chance against the light-heeled fox, who is always in racing condition, whereas the retriever, with his curly coat and good living, will be blown before he has run a mile, I continue my walk. Presently the dog returns panting like a porpoise; and conscious of his irregular conduct, before he takes his usual place at my side, stops behind a little while, wagging his tail, and grinning in the most coaxing manner imaginable, till he has examined my face with that skill in physiognomy which all dogs possess: then seeing that I cannot help smiling at him, he jumps boldly up to me, knowing that he is forgiven.

Occasionally a blackcock flies past us. These birds, a considerable number of which frequent this wild region, sleep every night in the highest and roughest heather they can find, in order to guard against the attacks of the fox, who in his hunting excursions seldom walks over that kind of ground, preferring beaten tracks, or the edges of pools or marshes, along which he can walk unheard and easily, till his acute nose warns him of the vicinity of some prey; whereas the

strong and large heather in which blackcocks roost cannot be walked over quietly and comfortably by an animal whose legs are so short as those of a fox. The grey hens stand a much worse chance. Led by their maternal instinct to build their nests near the edges of the smoother grounds, where their young, when hatched, can run about, they are so much exposed to the attack of the foxes, that scarcely one is left, and before long the breed in this part of the country will be quite worn out.

Up to his knees in a swamp stands a beautiful roebuck, feeding quickly and hungrily on the coarse grasses which grow there: whilst half way up the brae, a doe and her fawn are nibbling the faded leaves off a wild-rose bush. By a little management I could easily get within thirty yards of them, but I prefer watching them a little while with my glass. The buck has got the wind of me now, and starting up, looks quickly round, and then bounds up the steep brae to where the doe and fawn are standing, and after the whole party have halted on the top for a minute to reconnoitre me, they all bound off again into the densest part of the thicket.

As I approach home, and the evening comes on, different small flocks of wild ducks pass with whistling pinion over my head, on their way to some well-known stubble. The barley fields appear to be their favourite feeding ground at this season, probably because there is always more barley left on the ground than any other kind of grain.

The ferryman at the river where I pass tells me that he "is thinking that I have had a long travel, but that I have not got much *ven-ni-son*." In both surmises he is not far wrong, but I have enjoyed my long and rough walk as much—ay, and much more—than I should have done the best battue in Norfolk, or the best day's grouse shooting in Perthshire. But it is time I should finish my chapter; we all become prosy when talking of our favourite pursuits.

"Navita de ventis, de tauris narrat arator,
Enumerat miles vulnere, pastor oves:"

And when I once get fairly launched on the subject of wild ducks and roebucks, mountains and floods, the honest truth is that I know not when to stop, and must, I fear, frequently exhaust the patience of the most indulgent reader.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NOVEMBER.

The Snow Bunting—Regularity of appearance—Tomtit and Thrushes; worthy of protection—The Water Ousel—Trout—Otters; the defence of their young—Otter-hunting—Habits of Otters—Seals; power of remaining under water; habits of; decrease of—Wild Swans—Plovers, &c.—Dun Divers—Hares.

NOVEMBER, month though it be of cold winds and sleet, is generally ushered in by flocks of that beautiful little bird the snow bunting. For three successive years I have first seen this winter visitor on the 1st of November, which is another instance of the regularity of birds in their migrations. Scarcely any two of the snow buntings are quite alike. In the first flocks that come there are only a few which are light-coloured, but as the snow and frost increase the white birds become more numerous. I do not know whether they arrive during the night, but I have constantly heard their note after it has been quite dark, the birds being at the time on wing; and this sometimes occurs several hours after night-fall.

A beautiful little blue tomtit has taken up his abode voluntarily in the drawing-room. It would seem that at first he was attracted by the few house flies who at this season crawl slowly about the windows. These he was most active in searching for and catching, inserting his little bill into every corner and crevice, and detecting every fly which had escaped the brush of the housemaid. He soon, however, with increased boldness, came down to pick up crumbs, which the children placed for him close to me on the table. From his activity and perseverance in exterminating flies, this bird appears well worthy of protection.

The thrushes, and blackbirds too, earn the favour of the gardener by their constant destruction of snails, in search of which, at this season, they are all day busily employed in turning over the dead leaves under the garden walls, and at the bottom of the hedges. My experience convinces me that there are few of the common birds whose perseverance in destroying grubs, caterpillars, &c., for at least nine months of the year, does not amply repay the mischief done by them in eating cherries and seeds during the remaining three. It is difficult, however, to persuade the farmer to look on rooks and wood-pigeons as his friends, when he sees them in flocks

on the nearly ripe wheat-field, on the produce of which he mainly depends for paying his rent. Nevertheless, were he to examine the crops of any of these wild birds, and see what they were filled with during three-fourths of the year, he would find that they fully recompense him for all the grain they devour. Undoubtedly a considerable quantity of newly-sown wheat is eaten by different birds. Sea-gulls, amongst others, seem to swallow the grain indiscriminately with the grubs and worms turned up by the harrows; and large flocks of greenfinches and buntings are busily occupied in searching for whatever corn is not well covered over. The wild ducks, too, come at night to shovel up what remains in the furrows.

This is the season at which partridges migrate from the high grounds to the cultivated fields. Fresh unbroken coveys frequently appear near the lower part of the river: sometimes they come in flocks of twenty or thirty. In damp weather these birds seek the dry and warm ground on the sandy places about the lower islands, and appear entirely to desert the fields excepting at feeding time.

The water-ousel enlivens the burn now by its low but sweet note, uttered either while perched on its accustomed stone in the midst of a rapid, or whilst floating with open wings on the surface of a quiet pool—a method of proceeding quite peculiar to this interesting little bird. The salmon fishers wage war to the knife with the water-ousel; and, indeed, I have no doubt that it is not a little destructive to the spawning beds, though I am inclined to think that it attacks the trout spawn more frequently than that of the salmon. If so, this bird also does fully as much good as harm; the most deadly enemy to salmon being the larger burn trout, whose favourite food is, undoubtedly, the ova of the salmon.

The trout now betake themselves to every running stream, working their way up the narrowest rills, in order to place their spawn.

At this time of the year the otters are constant visitors at the lower parts of the river, searching for flounders, eels, &c. There are certain small hillocks which every otter as he passes appears to examine in order to find the trace of any chance stranger of his own species. There are now two old ones and two young ones hunting the lower part of the Findhorn; their presence is always easily detected by their tracks on the sandy banks, as they constantly leave the

water on their return up the stream to the quiet hiding-places where they pass the day.

When accompanied by her young the female otter throws aside her usual shyness, and is ready to do stout battle in their behalf. A Highlander of my acquaintance happened to find a couple of young otters in a hollow bank, and having made prisoners of them was carrying them home in triumph in his plaid. The old otter, however, attracted by their cries, left the river, and so determinedly opposed his carrying them away, by placing herself directly in his path, and blowing and hissing like a cat at him, with tail and bristles erect, that the man, although as stout a fellow as ever trod on heather, was glad to give up one of the young ones, and make his escape with the other while the mother was occupied in assuring herself of the safe condition of the one she had rescued.

When caught young no animal is more easily tamed than the otter; and it will soon learn to fish for its master. In educating all wild animals, however, it is absolutely necessary that the pupil should live almost constantly with its teacher, so as to become perfectly familiarised with his voice and presence.

Even when young the otter is a most powerful and severe biter, closing its jaws with the strength of a vice on whatever it seizes. Every courageous dog who has once battled with an otter, retains ever afterwards the most eager and violent animosity against the animal. The scent of an otter renders my otherwise most tractable retriever quite uncontrollable. The remembrance of former bites and wounds seems to drive him frantic, and no sooner does he come across the fresh track of one than he immediately throws aside all control, and is off *ventre à terre* in pursuit.

It is not often that an otter commits himself so far as to be found during the daytime in any situation where he can be approached; but one day in this month I was out for a quiet walk with my retriever, looking at some wide drains and small pools for wild ducks, when suddenly the dog went off, nose to the ground, in so eager a manner that I knew nothing but a fox or an otter could have been the cause of his excitement; and I soon found in a nearly dry open drain the quite recent track of a very large otter. For a long time he would not show himself, till suddenly the dog rushed into a thick juniper bush, and the next moment dog and otter

were tumbling over each other into a deep black pool. The otter escaped from the dog in the water; but the hole being only about six feet square, though deep, I took my retriever out by main force, and waited for the water to become clear again. When it did so, I looked for the otter for some time in vain, till at last, having stooped down close to the pool, I was startled by seeing his face within a few inches of my own, his body being almost entirely concealed by the overhanging bank. I tried to make him leave his cover, but in vain; so I sent the dog in again, who soon found him, and after a short scuffle, the otter left the pool, and went off along a wide but shallow drain, and there the battle began again. The dog, though unable to master the otter, who was one of the largest size, managed to prevent his escape, and at last I contrived to end the contest by a well-applied blow from a piece of railing which I had picked up.

Otter skins, when well dressed by a skilful furrier, make a valuable addition to a lady's winter wardrobe, the under fur being peculiarly soft, silky, and of a rich brown colour.

I am daily more and more convinced that the otter is by no means so great an enemy to salmon as he is supposed to be; his general food being trout, eels, and flounders; although of course when a salmon comes in his way, he is sufficiently an epicure not to refuse taking it. An otter seldom kills a salmon without leaving enough of the fish to betray him, as most people who live near salmon rivers know full well; but the remains of the trout and eels which he kills are not so conspicuous. I am borne out in this opinion by Mr. Young, the manager of the Duke of Sutherland's salmon fishings, whose opportunities of observation, and acuteness in judging on all points connected with subjects of this kind, ought to make his favourable opinion of otters equivalent to a verdict of acquittal whenever they are accused of being great salmon destroyers.

The seal, on the contrary, is a constant and most annoying enemy to the salmon fisher, breaking the stake nets, and enabling the fish who are already enclosed to escape. Besides which a seal, hunting along the shore near the nets, drives the salmon out into the deeper water, beyond the reach of the fisherman. The seal is also a much more rapid swimmer than the otter, and I have no doubt that he can take a salmon by actual speed in the open sea, although he cunningly prefers catching his prey with the

assistance of the stake-nets, when he has comparatively little trouble.

I have frequently been told that the seal cannot remain under water for more than a quarter of an hour without coming to the surface to breathe. I am, however, confident that this is not the case, and that he can continue for hours under the water when lying undisturbed and at rest. If caught and entangled in a net he is soon exhausted and drowned.

I was assured by a man who was constantly in pursuit of seals that one day, having found a very young one left by its mother on the rocks, near Lossiemouth, he put it into a deep round hole full of water left by the receding tide. For two hours, during which he waited, expecting to see the old female come in with the flow of the tide, the little animal remained, as he expressed it, "like a stone" at the bottom of the water, without moving or coming to the surface to breathe. He then took it out, and found it as well and lively as ever; and on turning it loose into the sea it at once began swimming about with some other young ones.

In a creek of the sea where I sometimes watch for seals, I have seen two or three come in with the flow of the tide. After playing about for a short time, they have disappeared under the water, and have not shown themselves again till the receding tide has warned them that it was time to leave the place. From the situation they were in, and the calmness of the water, the seals could scarcely have put up their noses to breathe without my having seen them. Apparently they sunk to the bottom in a certain part of the bay, in order to be at rest, and remained there till the ebb was pretty far advanced, when they reappeared in the same place where I had lost sight of them, perhaps some hours before. It was a curious and amusing sight to see these great creatures swim up within a few yards of the ambuscade which I had erected close to the narrow entrance where the tide came in to fill the bay. At thirty or forty yards distance I found it impossible to shoot a seal swimming, if he had seen me and was watching my movements: my best chance always was when the animal, having turned away, presented the broad back of his head as a mark to my rifle. If I arrived at the place in time to do so, I put up some small object at a distance off on the side of the inlet opposite to where I was concealed. This had the effect of distracting the attention of the animal from his real danger.

A flock of seals playing and fighting on a sandbank is one of the drollest sights which I know in this country. Their uncouth cries and movements are unlike anything else. In the Dornoch Firth and near Tain there are still great numbers of them, and every fine day they are in large flocks on the sandbanks; but near this part of the country they have been very much thinned off, and scarcely any are killed excepting by myself. My keeper tells me, that when he was a boy, their number was very great, and that the inhabitants of the place could always kill as many as they wanted for oil, and for their skins, picking out the largest of the herds, and sparing the smaller ones; but, alas! cheap guns and salmon fisheries have combined to make them scarce. Formerly, also, in the pools left by the sea within the old bar of Findhorn, numbers of seals were left at every ebb of the tide, and the farmers occasionally went down and killed a few to supply themselves with oil for the winter.

Any unusual number of wild fowl in the bay at this season generally prognosticates stormy weather or snow. On the 27th I saw nearly fifty wild swans swimming and flying between this place and the town of Findhorn; and some large flocks of geese were passing over to the south. The next day the ground was covered with snow, an unusual occurrence at this season. Of these swans one flock of six located themselves in the fresh-water lakes between this and Nairn, and the rest wended their way to the south. The Icelanders hail the appearance of the wild swan in the same manner as we do that of the cuckoo or swallow; it being with them the foreteller of spring and genial weather; whilst here they are connected in our minds with storms and snow-clad fields.

The Loch of Spynie is another established wintering place of the wild swan. A few years ago great numbers remained both in that loch and in Loch Lee during the whole winter. I know of no other fresh-water lakes in this country where they now appear regularly. Near Invergordon numbers of swans feed with other wild fowl on the sea-grass.

Late in the evening the golden plovers come in considerable numbers to the bare grass fields to feed during the night; but when the ground is hardened by frost, they resort to the sands at the ebb-tide, both by night and day. Whilst the tide is high, these birds fly up to the hills, resting on those places where the heather is short; and their instinct

teaches them exactly when to leave the hills for the sands as soon as the sea has receded sufficiently; and yet their principal resting-place is fully five miles inland.

I have observed the same instinct in the female sheldrakes when sitting on their eggs. Although several feet underground they know to a moment when the tide has sufficiently ebbed, and then, and only then, do they leave their nest to snatch a hasty meal on the cockles, &c., which they find on the sands.

The frost and snow send all the mallards down from the hill lakes to the bay. I shot a bird exactly answering to Bewick's description of the dun diver, excepting that it was much smaller. Bewick describes his bird as twenty-seven inches in length. This was only twenty inches. It was apparently quite full grown. I shot it whilst it was fishing in a small stream, and the bird had already swallowed twenty-five sticklebacks and one small eel. Its bright red bill is well adapted to hold any fish, however slippery, being supplied with the sharp teeth sloping inwards which are peculiar to birds of this class.

Hares have a particular fancy for sitting near houses, undeterred by the noise of the men and dogs who may inhabit them. When found sitting, a hare sometimes seems fascinated in an extraordinary manner by the eye of a person looking at her. As long as you keep your eye fixed on that of the hare, and approach her from the front, she appears afraid to move, and, indeed, will sometimes allow herself to be taken up by the hand. A hare, when dogs are near her, is particularly unwilling to start from her form. In cover-shooting many of the old and experienced hares steal off quietly the moment they hear the sound of dogs or beaters at one end of the wood; and thus their quick senses of hearing and smelling enable them to escape the guns, however numerous and however well placed. Shooters in wood pay too little attention to the direction of the wind. All small game, like deer, are most unwilling to face an enemy standing to windward of them; but keepers either expect, or pretend to expect, that game will always go exactly ahead of the beaters, though the least observation ought to have taught them the contrary; for when once running game have discovered the scent of an enemy, they will never go in that direction, but will make their way back in spite of all the noise and exertions of the beaters.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DECEMBER.

Owls; destruction of Mice by them—Frogs—Snakes—Roebucks—Fondness of Birds for Sunshine—Loch of Spynie—Habits of Wild Fowl; rapidity of their flight—Retrievers—The Otter; shooting of, by night—Eley's Cartridges—Wild Swans—Accidents in Shooting—Variety of Country in Moray—Forres; public Walks of—Rabbits—Foxes—Immigration of Birds—Conclusion.

DURING the clear frosty nights of this month we hear the owls hooting for hours together in the old ash trees around the house. Occasionally they used to be caught in the pole-traps set for hawks, but the poor fellows looked so pitiable as they sat upright, held by the legs, that I took down all these traps, which were set near the house. And the owl is far more a friend than an enemy to man: the mischief he does to game is very trifling; but the service he is of to the gardener, the farmer, and even to the planter of forest trees, by destroying rats and mice, is incalculable. I have a great liking, too, for the quaint, old-fashioned looking bird, and by no means believe him to be the

“*Ignavus bubo, dirum mortalibus omen.*”

My kitchen-garden was overrun with mice, who not only ate up peas and other seeds, but also nibbled and destroyed great numbers of peaches; but since I have had a tame owl in the garden, the mice have disappeared entirely, having been destroyed by him and his relations and friends who visit him at night. Sometimes an owl, either the common brown one or else one of the long-eared kind, posts himself all day long, bolt upright, in one of the evergreens near the house. The small birds first point out his whereabouts, by their clamour and fluttering round him; but the owl sits quite unconcerned in the midst of the uproar, blinking his eyes and nodding his head as quietly as if in his accustomed sequestered thicket or hollow tree.

The long-eared owl, with his bright yellow eyes and hooked bill, has a most imp-like appearance when seen sitting motionless on the low branch of a tree or ivy-covered wall.

The chief food of owls are mice and birds, but they are also very fond of frogs. When an owl catches one of these animals, instead of swallowing it whole, as he does a mouse, he tears it to pieces, while still alive, in the most cruel manner, regardless of its shrill cries.

I have no doubt that were it not for their numerous enemies, such as birds of prey, crows, ravens, rats, &c., frogs would increase to such a degree as to become a serious nuisance. The snake is another of the frog's devourers. It is a curious, although I cannot venture to say a pleasant sight, to see one of these reptiles attack and swallow a living frog, of a diameter four times as large as its own. After a frog has been pursued for a short time by a snake, it suddenly seems to be fascinated by the bright, sparkling eye of its enemy, and gives up all attempt at escape; then the snake, with a motion so rapid that the eye cannot keep pace with it, darts on its unhappy prey, generally seizing it by the hind-leg. There now commences a struggle for life and death, the frog clinging pertinaciously to any branch or projection which it can reach with its fore-legs; but all in vain; for the snake quietly but surely, by a kind of muscular contraction, or suction, gradually draws the frog into its mouth, its jaws expanding and stretching in the most extraordinary and inconceivable manner, in order to admit of the disproportioned mouthful.

I have little doubt that many birds and other animals are in reality fascinated by the fixed gaze of a snake, when they once come under the immediate influence of his eye. Their presence of mind and power of escape, or even of moving, seems entirely to desert them when their enemy is near them, and they become so paralyzed with fear, that the snake has nothing to do but to seize them. Any person who has seen one of our common snakes swallow a large frog will readily believe all accounts of deer being swallowed by the giant-serpent of the East.

Early in December the roebucks lose their horns. I have shot them during the first week of this month with the horns so loose that they have fallen off as the animal was carried home. They are, however, in as good and perhaps even better order for the table in December than at any other time.

The roe being very much disturbed by woodcutters in most of our woods, keep to the wild, rough extent of cover, too young for the axe, which lies between the upper country and the shore; there they live in tolerable security, in company with the foxes, black game, and wild fowl which tenant the woods and swamps of that district. Occasionally, while I am woodcock shooting, a roe affords a pleasant variety

and weighty addition to the game bag. All my dogs, whether pointers, spaniels, terriers, or retrievers, become very eager when on the scent of roe.

The blackcocks, like other birds, are very fond of catching the last evening rays of a winter's sun, and are always to be found in the afternoon on banks facing the west, or swinging, if there is no wind, on the topmost branch of the small fir trees. On the mountains, too, all birds, as the sun gets low, take to the slopes which face the west; whilst in the morning they betake themselves to the eastern banks and slopes to meet his rays. No bird or animal is to be found in the shade during the winter, unless it has flown there for shelter from some imminent danger. This is very remarkable in the case of the golden plover, who in the evening ascend from slope to slope as each becomes shaded by intervening heights, until they all are collected on the very last ridge which the sun shines upon. When this is no longer illuminated, and the sun is quite below the horizon, they betake themselves to their feeding-places near the seashore and elsewhere. Goats have the same habit.

There is no fresh-water lake which has so large a quantity of wild fowl on it as the Loch of Spynie; and I do not know a more amusing sight than the movements and proceedings of the thousands of birds collected there during this season. All wild fowl, from the swan to the teal, swarm on this lake; and it is most interesting to see the habits and manners of feeding and of passing their time of the different kinds, some feeding only by night and others moving about at all hours. On the approach of night, however, the whole community becomes restless and on the move, and the place is alive with the flocks flying to and fro, all uttering their peculiar notes, and calling to each other, as they pass from one part of the loch to another. The mallards for the most part take to the fields in search of food, flying either in pairs or in small flocks of five or six. The widgeon keep in companies of ten or twelve, whistling constantly to each other as they fly to feed on the grassy edges of the lochs. The teal and some other birds feed chiefly on the mud-banks and shallows which abound in parts of this half-drained lake; and amongst the loose stones of the old castle of Spynie, which overlooks it, and where formerly proud ecclesiastics trod, the badger has now taken up his solitary dwelling.

The flight of wild fowl in the evening is more rapid in

reality than it appears to be; and I have seen many a good shot fairly puzzled by it, and unable to kill these birds at this period of the day with any certainty until practice had taught them the necessity of aiming well ahead. Another great requisite to success in wild-fowl shooting is a first-rate retriever, quick and sagacious in finding and bringing the killed and wounded birds from the swampy and grassy places in which they fall. Long shots ought never to be taken in the evening, as, independently of the time lost in loading (during which operation, by the bye, the birds always contrive to come over your head) you are sure to lose many which fly away wounded, to drop several hundred yards off, serving only to feed the foxes and crows, which always seem to be on the look-out for food near the lakes and marshes.

Some retrievers have a most wonderful instinct in discovering whether a wounded bird is likely to fall; invariably marking down and finding them, without wasting their time and strength in vain pursuit of those which are able to escape.

Nothing is more trying to the constitution of a dog than this kind of shooting in the winter; when the poor animal spends his time either in paddling or swimming about in half-frozen water, or in shivering at his master's feet whilst waiting for a fresh shot. The master perhaps has waterproof boots and a warm jacket on, a pipe in his mouth, and a mouthful of brandy to keep him warm; while his poor dog has none of these accompanying comforts, and is made to sit motionless on the wet or frozen ground with the water freezing on his coat. For my own part I administer as much as I can to the comfort of my canine companion, by always carrying him some biscuits, and by giving him either my plaid or a game-bag to lie upon. It is amusing enough to see the retriever wrapped in the plaid, with only his head out of it, watching eagerly for the appearance of a flock of widgeon or ducks, which he often sees before I do myself.

The best and most sagacious dog of this kind that I ever saw, and whose cunning and skill were unequalled, I sold to make room for a stronger retriever, who, however, never equalled his predecessor in sagacity and usefulness. I the less repented having parted with the dog, as he fell into the hands of a friend of mine, Captain Cumming, a most excellent shot and persevering wild-fowl shooter, who fully appreciated the good qualities of the animal. The Loch of

Spynie belonging principally to this gentleman's family, he preserves the place strictly; and I do not know so successful a wild-fowl shooter—successful I mean in a gentlemanly and sportsmanlike manner—and with what I term *fair shooting*. With due deference to the followers of this sport, I cannot include under that denomination the punt and swivel-gun system. Amongst other objections to this kind of sport is the vast number of birds maimed, wounded, and left to perish miserably, or to feed crows and other vermin. Not even Colonel Hawker's amusing work on the subject reconciles me to this (proh pudor!) his favourite branch of sport.

In the snow I constantly see the tracks of weasels and stoats going for considerable distances along the edges of open ditches and streams, where they search not only for any birds which may be roosting on the grassy banks of the ditches, but also for eels and whatever fish they can make prey of.

The otters, too, puzzled by the accumulation of ice and frozen snow on the shallows, and about the mouth of the river, go for miles up any open ditch they can find; turning up the unfrozen mud in search of eels, and then rolling on the snow to clean themselves.

There are few animals whose scent is so attractive to dogs of all kinds as the otter; but it requires that they should have great experience in order to be sure of finding an otter, or of following with any certainty when started, so strange and well concealed are the nooks and corners of broken banks and roots under which it lies, or takes refuge when hunted.

My old keeper has great delight in the pursuit of otters, and continually neglects his more legitimate duties for the sake of getting a midnight shot at one of these animals. Having carefully determined on the way from which the wind blows, and made himself sure that no eddy of air can carry his own scent towards the stream, the old man sits well concealed under a projecting bank near some shallow ford, where he expects the otter will appear on his way up or down the burn. This plan seldom fails, and he not unfrequently makes his appearance in the morning with a dead otter in his hand, the result of many hours of patient watching in a winter's night, of which the disordered and somewhat bemuddled appearance of his habiliments bears further witness. I cannot plead guilty of ever sending him on these expeditions. In the first place I have no very

deadly feud with the otters; and, in the next, I think that the old fellow would be better in his bed than squatting under a broken bank through a long winter's night.

Though not an advocate for Eley's cartridges for game shooting, I use a great number of them against stronger animals, such as otters, foxes, and roe, and also for wild-fowl shooting of all kinds. In steady hands these cartridges undoubtedly do great execution amongst ducks and geese; but they are very apt to induce the sportsman to take shots which are too long and random, conceiving that no distance is too great for this kind of charge. That they very frequently do not open at all, or at any rate sufficiently soon, I have clearly ascertained; and I have often found in shooting roe and hares that the cartridge has passed through the animal like a single ball. Every sportsman knows that this will not answer his purpose in general shooting; and, therefore, that Eley's cartridges should only be used in the most open places, and at strong birds and animals.

The wild swans still remain feeding in the lakes, and seem to have completely made themselves at home; going lazily off to the bay when disturbed, but seldom taking the trouble to do so unless the particular loch which they frequent, and in which they feed, comes within the line of my beat for wild ducks. When their territory is invaded, they first collect in a close body, and after a short conference, flap along the water for some distance, and gradually rising fly across the sandhills with loud cries to the sea. Hundreds of ducks of all kinds constantly attend on the swans when feeding, to snatch at the water-grasses and weeds pulled up by the long-necked birds from the bottom of the shallow water—a proceeding the swans seem by no means to approve of, as they evidently have no wish to labour for the good of these active little pirates.

It has often occurred to me, how perfectly helpless a man would be were he to lame himself during the distant and lonely wanderings on the mountain which the pursuit of deer and wild game sometimes leads him into; and I was forcibly reminded of this by a curious accident which happened to myself in the woods of Altyre while roe-shooting this month.

The hounds were in pursuit of a roe; and I was partly occupied in listening to their joyous cry, and partly in admiring the beautiful light thrown by the low rays of the

winter sun on the bright trunks of the fir trees, contrasted as it was with the gloomy darkness of their foliage, when I heard the foot of a roe as it came towards me, *ventre à terre*. Taking a cool aim I sent a cartridge through the poor animal's head, who, of course, fell rolling over like a rabbit. I went up in order to bleed her, according to rule, when just as I was knife in hand, I heard the hounds coming up in chase of another roe. I dropped the knife on the heather, and at that instant the dying roe gave an expiring plunge, as animals almost always do when shot in the head. Her hind foot struck the hilt of the *couteau de chasse*, driving it straight into my foot. Having, not without some little difficulty, drawn it out, I had next to cut off my shoe, when the blood came out like a *jet d'eau*. Making a tourniquet of my handkerchief and a bit of stick, I managed to stop the bleeding, not however before I began to feel a little faint. Then not waiting for my companions, who were at a distant part of the woods, I hobbled off to a forester's house, where I rebound the cut, and having directed the man where to find the roe, and to tell the other shooters that I had left the woods, I made my way homewards as well as I could, and luckily meeting on the road one of my servants exercising a pony, I got home without more inconvenience, but I had to pass many a long day upon a sofa. Had a similar accident happened on some of the wild and distant mountains of the country where I often shoot, I should probably not have been seen again, till the ravens and the storms of winter had left nothing but my bones. From such slight and trivial causes do accidents sometimes happen to remind us how helpless we all are.

In the low parts of Morayshire the snow seldom lies long, and consequently after every lengthened snow-storm there is a constant migration not only of wild-fowl of all kinds, but also of partridges and other game, who come down to the bay and shore from the higher parts of the district, where the ground is more completely covered with snow, the depth of which decreases gradually as one recedes from the shore.

A more strikingly varied drive of twenty miles can scarcely be taken than from the Spey at Grantown down to Forres on the sea-side near the mouth of the Findhorn river. After emerging from the woods of Castle Grant, in the immediate vicinity of the Spey, and that curiously-built place Grantown, with its wide street of houses, almost wholly inhabited

by Grants, which appellation with every variety of Christian name is written at least on nine houses out of every ten, the traveller comes out on the extended flats and moors of the district round Brae Moray, where there is scarcely a sign of life, animal or human; excepting when a grouse rises from the edge of the road, or runs with comb and head erect a few yards into the heather, and then crouches till the intruder has passed by. There is, I admit, a turnpike-house here, but it is a wretched-looking affair, and its tenant must live a life as solitary as a lighthouse keeper. After several miles of this most dreary though not very elevated range, the road enters the woods and for a long distance passes through a succession or rather one continued track of fine fir-trees. It goes through the beautiful grounds of Altyre, and along the banks of the most picturesque part of the Findhorn; and gradually descending it opens upon the rich fields and firth of Moray, with the mountains of Ross, Caithness, and Sutherland—a glorious range—in the background: a great and most pleasing change from the dreary brown muirland near Brae Moray. Having passed through this long and varied track of woodland, the road suddenly emerges into the rich open corn-land of the most fertile district in Scotland, near the bay of Findhorn, where the river, as if tired by its long and rapid course, gradually and slowly mixes itself with the salt water of the Moray Firth. By crossing the river near this spot, another very different kind of country is reached—the strange sand-hills of Findhorn or Culbin. Thus, in a very few hours' drive, as great a variety of country is passed through as could be found in any part of the island, each portion of which is characteristic and interesting.

Forres itself is one of the prettiest and cleanest little towns in the kingdom. The entrance from the river Findhorn is extremely picturesque; and the bright sparkling burn, with the public bleaching-green close to the town, always gives it a gay and lively appearance. The town magistrates, too, with public-spirited zeal, have laid out pleasure-grounds and walks on the wooded hill above the town, which, as regards the views which they command of rich cultivated land, are probably not surpassed by any in the kingdom.

During the time that the snow remained on the ground, the rabbits in a wood near my house took to barking the fine old hollies, thus destroying trees of a very great age, and of from eight to ten inches in diameter. Oaks also of twenty

years' growth are frequently destroyed by these animals. In fact, wherever they once establish themselves they overrun the country and become a nuisance. In the sand-hills of Culbin I admit that they can do but small mischief, there being in that region little else but bent, sea-weed, and furze-bushes. They thrive however on this food, and in spite of foxes and guns keep up their numbers sufficiently to afford plenty of sport. The foxes are numerous in the rough wild district which lies to the west of the sand-hills, and hunt regularly for rabbits wherever they abound. From their tracks it is evident that two foxes constantly hunt together; and they take different sides of every hillock.

If a fox finds a rabbit at a sufficient distance from the cover, he catches it by fair running; but most of his prey he obtains by dint of the numberless stratagems which have earned for him a famous, or rather infamous, reputation from time immemorial. From what I have myself seen of the cunning of the fox, I can believe almost any story of his power of deceiving and inveigling animals into his clutches. Nor does his countenance belie him; for handsome animal as he certainly is, his face is the very type and personification of cunning.

The cottagers who live near the woods are constantly complaining of the foxes, who steal their fowls frequently in broad daylight; carrying them off before the faces of the women, but never committing themselves in this way when the men are at home. From the quantity of debris of fowls, ducks, &c., which are strewed here and there near the abodes of these animals, the mischief they do in this way must be very great.

Cunning, however, as they are, I not unfrequently put them up while walking through the swamps. They lie, in fancied security, on some dry tuft of heather in the midst of the pools; and not expecting or being accustomed to be disturbed, they remain there until my retriever raises them close to my feet. One fine day in the beginning of this month, when the sun was bright and warm, a setter who was with me made a very singular kind of point in the long heather, looking round at me with an air most expressive of "Come and see what I have here." As soon as I got near, the dog made a rush into the rough heather, putting out a large dog fox, who had been napping or basking. The fox made a bolt almost between my legs to get at a hole near

the place; but I stopped him with a charge of duck shot: the dog, though as steady as possible at all game, pursued the fox full cry, and when he rolled over, worried and shook him, as a bull-dog would a cat.

December, in this part of the island, is seldom a very cold or boisterous month; our principal storms of snow and wind come with the new year. Frequently indeed there is no covering of snow on that part of the county which lies within the influence of the sea-air till February.

During the first days of snow and storm a constant immigration of larks takes place; these birds continuing to arrive from seaward during the whole day, and frequently they may be heard flying in after it is dark. They come flitting over in a constant straggling stream, not in compact flocks; and pitching on the first piece of ground which they find uncovered with snow, immediately begin searching for food; feeding indiscriminately on insects, small seeds, and even on turnip leaves, when nothing else can be found.

The wagtails frequent the sheepfolds near the shore, and keep up an active search for the insects which are found about these animals.

And now having brought my readers (if the patience of any of them has enabled them to follow me so far) to the end of the year, and of my sojourn in Moray, I must say—Farewell.

I have aimed neither at book-making, nor at giving a scientific description or arrangement of birds and other animals. All I wish is that my rough and irregularly put together notes may afford a few moments of amusement to the old; and to the young not amusement only, but perhaps an incitement to them to increase their knowledge of natural history, the study of which in all its branches renders interesting and full of enjoyment many a ramble and many an hour in the country which might otherwise be passed tediously and unprofitably. We all know that there is scarcely a foot of ground that is not tenanted by some living creature, which, though it may offer itself to our observation in the lowly shape of an insect or even a minute shell, is as perfect in all its features and parts, in its habits and instincts, and as demonstrative of the surpassing wisdom and power

and goodness of the Creator, as the most gigantic quadruped which walks the earth.

Again, kind readers, Farewell !

DEER-STALKING.

DEER-STALKING.

CHAPTER XXV.

Deer-stalking; enjoyment of—Fine Stag; ill-luck in stalking; escapes of Stag; start in pursuit of him—View of Country—Roebucks—Hare and Marten—Tracks of Deer; find the Stag; death of—Meet the Shepherd—Cottage.

THOUGH we are all naturally gregarious animals, much pleasure is often derived from a lonely walk over mountain and moor, when, independent of the wishes or movements of any one else, we can go hither and thither as the objects or the fancy of the moment may lead us. In following up my sporting excursions I frequently prefer being alone, and independent of either friend or keeper; not from any disinclination to the society of my fellow-men—far from it—but from a liking to watch and observe the habits and proceedings of many of the living animals of the country. Now one's friend may become bored by being carried off from his shooting, and being hampered by the movements of another person whose attention for the time being is taken up in following some bird or beast not included in the game-book, and therefore not deemed worthy of notice during the shooting season. If my own larder or that of my friend is in want of replenishing, I can fill it as well and quickly as most people; but at other times I like to take my shooting quietly. In deer-stalking the solitary sportsman has often great advantages, though his enjoyment of the sport is much enhanced by the thought that he has some friend, some "fidus Achates," to whom he can relate the incidents of the day, and who, following the same pursuits, will enjoy and appreciate the account of the pains and fatigues he has undergone before bringing down the noble animal whose horns he exhibits in triumph. Much of my deer-stalking time was spent alone, or at most with no companionship save that of an ancient and experienced Highlander, or a chance visitor—some travelling laird or sportsman—who was as glad to receive as I was to give provend and rest for himself

and horses. From these circumstances I got into the habit of sketching off an account of my day's wanderings, when they had been of that kind that I felt I might say to myself "*forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit.*"

I had more than once seen in a particular corrie, or not far from it, a remarkably fine stag: his horns, though not peculiarly long, were heavy and large, with ten points well and evenly set on, of a dark colour, and the points as white as ivory. The animal himself was evidently of very great size and age, and in fine condition. He lived quite alone, and did not seem to associate with any of the other deer who frequented that district, although I once saw him rise and trot off, warned by the movement of a herd of hinds; and at another time he rose unexpectedly on my firing at two stags in a corrie: still on neither of these occasions, nor at any other time, did he appear to be lying in company with the other deer, although not above half a mile from them, nor did he join them in their flight when moved. Instead of this he invariably trotted off sulkily; and if I chanced to fall in with his track again, it was still solitary, and speeding in a direct course over bog and hill to some far off mountain glen or corrie. The shepherds, who generally gave me notice of any particularly fine stag they might see in their rounds, distinguished this one by a Gaelic name signifying the big red stag, as, besides his other attributes, his colour was of a peculiarly bright red. Donald and I made an unsuccessful raid or two into the red stag's country, some unforeseen or unguarded-against circumstance always warning him of our neighbourhood too soon; besides which he had a troublesome habit of suddenly rising in the most unaccountable manner from some unexpected corner or hollow. We might examine long and carefully the whole face of a hill, and having made ourselves perfectly sure that nothing larger than a mountain hare could be concealed on its surface, up would rise the red stag from some trifling hollow, or from behind some small hillock, and, without looking to the right or left, off he would go at his usual trot, till we lost him in the distance.

At another time, after we had beat, as we imagined, a whole wood, so that we were convinced that neither deer nor roe could have been passed over, up would get the stag out of some clump of larch or birch, apparently scarcely big enough to hold a hare. Or else he would rise at the very feet of one of the beaters, and though not above a hundred yards from

the corner where I was posted he always managed to turn back, perhaps almost running over some man who had no gun: but he invariably escaped being shot at, excepting on one occasion, when I placed a friend who was with me near a pass by which the stag sometimes left a favourite wood. I had stationed the shooter at the distance of half a mile from the wood, as the deer was always most careful of himself, and most suspicious of danger, when he first left the cover. On this occasion, according to my friend's account, the great beast had trotted quickly and suddenly past him at eighty yards distance, and took no notice of the barrels discharged at his broadside, though fired by a very good shot, and out of a first-rate Manton gun that carried ball like a rifle. My friend could not account for missing him; but missed he evidently was.

I determined one day to start off alone in pursuit of this stag, and to pay no attention to any other deer I might see during my excursion. Donald's orders were to meet me at a particular rock, about eight miles from home, the next day at two o'clock; my intention being, in the event of my not returning the same night, to work my way to a distant shepherd's house, and there to sleep. Donald had directions as to the line by which he was to come, that he might not disturb one or two favourite corries; and he was also to bring a setter and my shooting apparatus, as I took with me only a single-barrel rifle and a few bullets. I did not take Bran, as, being alone, I could not be quite sure that he would not be in my way when getting up to the deer, in case I found him; but I took a dog of a very different kind—a powerful bull-dog, who was well accustomed to deer-stalking, and who would lie down for an hour together if desired to do so, without moving an inch.

On leaving the house at daybreak, or at least before the sun was risen, I struck off in a straight line through the woods, till, having got through the whole cover, I sat myself down on the top of what was called the Eagle's Craig, and turned, for the first time that morning, to the east to look at the sun, which was now rising in its utmost glory and brightness,—a glorious sight, and one that loses not its interest though seen each returning day, particularly when viewed from the lonely places either of land or sea: below me lay a great extent of pine-wood, concealing the house and the cultivated land around it, with the exception of a glimpse

caught here and there of the bright green meadow which formed the banks of the river. The river itself was visible through many openings, and where the outline of the trees was lower than in other places: beyond the river rose a black-looking moorland, which, growing higher and higher, terminated in mountains with a most varied and fantastic outline of peaks and precipices, the stony sides of which were lighted up by the rising sun, and exhibited a strong contrast to the deep colour of the hills below them, covered with dark heather, and not yet reached by the sun's rays.

On the other side the ground was of quite a different character: immediately on leaving the wood, the country for some distance had a dreary, cold look, being covered not with heather, but with a kind of grey grass, called there deer's grass, which grows only in cold swampy ground. Here and there this was varied by ranges of greystone and rock, and dotted with numerous lochs. In the distance to the west I could see the upper part of a favourite rocky corrie, the sun shining brightly on its grey rocks: a little to my right the fir-woods terminated, but on that side, between me and the river, of which every bend and reach was there in full view, were numerous little hillocks with birch trees, old and rugged, growing on them: here and there, too, amongst these hillocks, was a great round grey rock, and the whole of this rough ground was intersected with bright green glades. Some three miles up the river a blue line of smoke ascended perpendicularly in the still morning, the chimney it came from being concealed by a group of birch-trees.

I looked carefully with my glass at all the nooks and grassy places to see if any deer were feeding about them, but could see nothing but two or three old roe. A moment after a pair of young roe walked quietly out of some concealed hollow, and after gazing about a short time and having a game of romps on the top of a hillock, were joined by their mother, and then all three came into the woods at the foot of the craig where I was sitting. The grouse were calling to each other in all directions, and every now and then an old cock-bird would take a short fly, crowing, to some stone or hillock, where he stood and sunned himself. I was struck just then by the curious proceedings of a mountain hare, who had been feeding about two hundred yards from me; she began to show symptoms of uneasiness and fear, taking short runs and then stopping, and turning her ears towards the

hillside behind her. I soon saw the cause of her alarm in a beautiful marten cat: the latter, however, having probably already made her morning meal, took little notice of the hare, but came with quiet leaps towards me. As I was well concealed amongst the grey fragments of rock which covered the top of the craig, and which were exactly the same colour as the clothes I was dressed in, the little animal did not see me. When about thirty yards off she suddenly stopped and looked in my direction, having evidently become aware, through some of her fine senses, of the vicinity of an enemy. She offered me a fair shot, and, well aware of the quantity of game killed by these animals, I sent a rifle-ball right into her yellow chest as she sat upright with her head turned towards me.

But time advanced, so I delayed no longer, and started off in a westerly direction. Many a weary mile did I tramp that day without seeing anything but grouse, and an occasional hare. Nevertheless I saw many fresh tracks of red deer: particularly crossing one mossy piece of ground, where there appeared to have been at least twenty or thirty deer, and amongst them one or two large fine stags. In one place I saw a solitary track of a noble stag, but it was two or three days old. I judged that the herd whose tracks I saw had a good chance of being in or about a corrie, a good view of which I should get from the next height; but after a long and tiresome survey of the ground I could see no living creature, excepting a heron, who was standing in his usual disconsolate attitude on a stone in the burn that ran out of the corrie, adding by his very presence to the solitude of the scene. "I don't understand where these deer can be," was my internal ejaculation, "but here they are not; so come on, good dog." Another and another height did I pass over, and many a glen did I scan inch by inch till my eyes ached with straining through the glass: nothing could I see, and I began to think to myself that as it was past two and the shepherd's house was some three hours' walk, I had better turn off in that direction; so slanting my course a little to the north, I pulled my plaid tight round me and walked on. In deer-stalking, as much as in the every-day pursuits of life, the old adage holds good—

Credula vitam

Spes fovet.

And this said hope carries the weary stalker over many a

long mile. I came in half an hour to a large extent of heather-covered ground, interspersed with a great number of tumulus-shaped hillocks. I looked carelessly over these, when my eye was suddenly attracted by a red-coloured spot on one of the mounds. I turned the glass in that direction, and at once saw that it was a large bright-coloured stag with fine antlers, and altogether an animal worth some trouble. He was in a very difficult situation to approach. He commanded a complete view of the face of the hill opposite to him, and over the summit of which I was looking, and I was astonished he had not observed me, notwithstanding all my care. As the wind blew, I could not approach him from the opposite direction, even if I had time to get round there before he rose; and I knew that once on foot to feed, his direction would be so uncertain amongst the mounds where he was, that my chance would be small.

After a short survey I started off at my best pace to the right, thinking that from the nature of the ground I might succeed in getting into the valley unobserved; and once there, by taking advantage of some hillock, I should have a tolerable chance of approaching him. After what appeared to me a long tramp I came to a slight rise of the shoulder of the hill: beyond this was a hollow, by keeping in which I hoped to get down unobserved. It was already past three, but the stag had not yet moved; so, keeping the tops of his horns in view, I began to crawl over the intervening height. At two or three places which I tried, I saw that I could not succeed. At last I came to a more favourable spot; but I saw that it still would not do, however well the dog behaved, and a capital stalker he was, imitating and following every movement of mine, crouching when I crouched, and crawling when I crawled. I did not wish to leave him quite so far from the deer, so I made another cast, and this time found a place over which we both wriggled ourselves quite unseen. Thank God! was my exclamation, as I found myself in a situation again where I could stand upright. Few people excepting deer-stalkers know the luxury of occasionally standing upright, after having wormed oneself horizontally along the ground for some time. There were the horns with their white tips still motionless, excepting when he turned back his head to scratch his hide, or knock off a fly. I now walked easily without stooping till I was within three or four hundred yards of him, when I was suddenly pulled up

by finding that there was no visible means of approaching a yard nearer. The last sheltering mound was come to; and although these mounds from a distance looked scattered closely, when I got amongst them I found they were two or three rifle-shots^a apart at the nearest. There was one chance that occurred to me: a rock, or rather stone, lay about eighty yards from the stag, and it seemed that I might make use of this as a screen, so as, if my luck was great, to get at the animal. I took off my plaid, laid it on the ground, and ordered the dog to lie still on it; then buttoning my jacket tightly, and putting a piece of cork, which I carried for the purpose, into the muzzle of my rifle to prevent the dirt getting into it, I started in the most snake-like attitude that the human frame would admit of. I found that by keeping perfectly flat, and not even looking up once, I could still get on unobserved. Inch by inch I crawled: as I neared the stone my task was easier, as the ground sank a little and the heather was longer. At last I reached the place, and saw the tips of his horns not above eighty yards from me. I had no fear of losing him now; so, taking out the cork from my rifle, I stretched my limbs one by one, and prepared to rise to an attitude in which I could shoot; then, pushing my rifle slowly forward, I got the barrel over the stone unperceived, and rose very gradually on one knee. The stag seemed to be intent in watching the face of the opposite hill, and, though I was partially exposed, did not see me: his attitude was very favourable, which is seldom the case when a stag is lying down; so, taking a deliberate aim at his shoulder, I was on the point of firing, when he suddenly saw me, and, jumping up, made off as hard as he could. He went in a slanting direction, and before he had gone twenty yards I fired. I was sure that I was steady on him, but the shot only seemed to hurry his pace; on he went like an arrow out of a bow, having showed no symptom of being hurt beyond dropping his head for a single moment.

I remained motionless in despair: a more magnificent stag I had never seen, and his bright red colour and white-tipped horns showed me that he was the very animal I had so often seen and wished to get. He ran on without slackening his pace for at least a hundred yards, then suddenly fell with a crash to the ground, his horns rattling against the stones. I knew he was perfectly dead, so, calling the dog, ran up to him. The stag was quite motionless, and lay stretched out

where he fell, without a single struggle. I found on opening him that the ball had passed through the lower part of his heart—a wound I should have imagined sufficient to have deprived any animal of life and motion instantaneously. But I have shot several deer through the heart, and have observed that when hit low they frequently ran from twenty to eighty yards. If, however, the ball has passed through the upper part of the heart, or has cut the large blood-vessels immediately above it, death has been instantaneous, the animal dropping without a struggle.

Having duly admired and examined the poor stag, not, I must own, without feeling compunction at having put an end to his life, I set to work bleeding and otherwise preparing him for being left on the hill till the next day, secure from attacks of ravens and eagles; then, having taken my landmarks, so as to be sure of finding him again, I started on my march to the shepherd's house, looking rather anxiously round at the increasing length of my shadow and the diminished height of the sun; the more so as I had to pass some very boggy ground with which I was not very well acquainted. I had not gone a quarter of a mile, however, when I saw the shepherd himself making his way homewards. I gave a loud whistle to catch his attention, and, having joined him, I took him back to show the exact place where the stag was lying, in order to save myself the trouble of returning the next day. Malcolm was rather an ally of mine, and his delight was great at seeing the stag.

"'Deed, aye, sir; it's just the muckle red stag himsel'; mony a time I've seen the bonny beast. Save us! how red his pile is!"

"Yes, he is a fine beast, Malcolm; and you must bring your grey pony for him to-morrow. I must have the head and one haunch down to the house: take the rest to your mother; I dare say she can salt it."

I knew pretty well that this good lady must have had some experience in making red deer hams, unless Malcolm was very much slandered by his neighbours; nevertheless he had promised me not to poach on my ground, and knowing that I trusted quite to his honour, I believe that he neither did so himself nor allowed any one else to do so.

"You are ower good, your honour; and the mither will be glad of a bit venison; it's a long time now since I killed a deer."

"When was the last, Malcolm?" I asked.

"Why, mony a day, sir; but to tell the truth, it was only yesterday since I shot at one."

"And where was that, Malcolm?"

"Why, if your honour wishes to know, and I am sure you will do no ill turn to a lad for taking a shoot, I'll just tell you."

I could not help smiling at Malcolm's describing himself as a lad. He was six feet three inches without his shoes, and a perfect giant in every proportion, but strong and active withal, and a capital stalker, being able to wind his great body about through moss and heather in a manner that was quite marvellous. Malcolm's account, then, was, that a shepherd on an adjoining property, or rather on one divided from where we were by a long lake, had asked him to come up some evening with his gun to "fleg" some deer that had been destroying his little crop of oats. Well, Malcolm had gone; and the evening before I met him he had fired in the dusk at a stag with a handful of large slugs; the deer was hit and crippled, but had thrown out the colley dogs, which had pursued him, by taking to the water and apparently swimming the loch. If he had managed to cross he would be on my side of it, and I might by chance fall in with him on my return home the next day in some of the burns and glens through which I should have to walk. I did not blame Malcolm much, knowing the mischief done by deer to the shepherds' little crops; besides which the ground where he had shot this stag was not preserved or used as a forest by the owner.

We had a weary walk, though enlivened by Malcolm's quaint remarks. Without his company and guidance I saw plainly that I should have had some difficulty in finding my way through the rough ground over which we had to pass. The night, too, had come on quite dark before we reached the shealing.

On entering I was much struck with the group which we saw by the light of several splinters of bog-fir laid on a stone. Malcolm's old father, a man whose years numbered at least fourscore, was reading a chapter of the Bible in Gaelic to the rest of his family, which consisted of his wife, a woman of nearly equal age to himself, but hale, neat, and vigorous, and of a sister and brother of Malcolm's; the former a peculiarly pretty, though somewhat extensive damsel; and the latter a

giant like Malcolm himself, equally good-looking, and equally respected in his own rank of life. The old man having looked off his book for a moment, without pausing in his reading, continued his chapter. Following Malcolm's example, I took off my cap, and sat down on a chest in the room, and though of course not understanding a word of what was read, instead of being inclined to smile at the peculiar twang and bagpipe-like drawl with which the old man read, I was struck by the appearance of real devotion and reverence of the whole group, and looked on with feelings of interest and respect till he came to the end of a somewhat lengthy chapter. This finished, the old man, resting his head on his hands, which his long grey hair entirely covered, uttered a short prayer in the same language. The moment this was done he handed the Bible to his daughter, who, wiping it with her apron, deposited it in a chest. I was then received with great kindness, and preparations were made for Malcom's and my supper, which consisted of tea, oatcake, eggs, and some kippered trout, caught in a stream running out of the large loch, and which when alive must have weighed at least twelve pounds: such cream and milk, too, as is met with, or at any rate enjoyed, only in the Highlands. With great discretion the old people talked to me but little during the meal, seeing that I was tired and hungry; but over the glass of capital toddy which succeeded the tea I had many a question to answer respecting the killing of the stag, &c. The old lady spoke very little English, but understood it well enough. The old shepherd listened with great interest, the more so from having been a somewhat famous stalker in his own time, and now a great lamenter of the good old time when deer and black cattle were more plentiful, and sheep comparatively few to what they are in the present day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Sleeping in Shepherd's House—Start in the Morning—Eagle—Wild Geese—Find Deer; unsuccessful shot—Rocky Ground—Wounded Stag—Keeper and Dog—Walk Home.

BEFORE the earliest grouse-cock had shaken his plumage, and called his mate from her heather couch, I had left my sleeping-place in the building that did duty for a barn, where deep in the straw and wrapped in my plaid I had slept

sound as a deerstalker, and I fancy no person sleeps more soundly. I had preferred going to roost in the clean straw to passing the night within the house, knowing by former experience that Malcolm's shealing was tenanted by myriads of nocturnal insects, which, like the ancient Britons, "*feri hospitibus*," would have left me but little quiet during the night. The last time I had slept there, all the fleas in the shealing, "*novitatis avidi*," had issued out, and falling on the body of the unlucky stranger, had attacked me in such numbers, that unanimity only was wanting in their proceedings to have enabled them to carry me off bodily. Tempted by the clean and fresh appearance of the good lady's sheets, I had trusted my tired limbs to their snowy whiteness, when, sallying forth from every crevice and every corner, thousands of these obnoxious insects had hopped on to me, to enjoy the treat of a supper of English blood. The natives of these places seem quite callous to everything of the kind.

To continue, however. After making good use of the burn that rippled along within fifty yards of the house, and having eaten a most alarming quantity of the composition called porridge, I sallied forth alone. Malcolm and his brother would fain have accompanied me, but the latter had to attend some gathering of sheep in a different direction, and Malcolm was obliged to go for the stag killed yesterday. He therefore only walked a few hundred yards up the first hill with me, in order to impress well on my recollection the different glens and burns he wished me to look at on my way to the place of rendezvous with old Donald. The sun was but a little distance above the horizon when I gained the summit of a tolerably long and steep ascent immediately behind Malcolm's house. A blackcock or two rose wild from some cairn of stones or hillock, where they had been enjoying the earliest rays of the sun, and flew back over my head to take shelter in the scattered birch thickets near the shealing; and here and there a pack of grouse rose, alighting again before they had flown a hundred yards, as if fully understanding that grouse shooting was not the order of the day, and, strutting along with their necks stretched up, seemed to care little for my presence. The ring-ousel flitted from rock to rock, uttering its wild and sweet note. Truly there is great enjoyment gained by the early riser; everything in nature has a pleasant aspect, and seems happy and thankful to see the light of another sun.

The great mountain to the west looked magnificent as its grey corries and cliffs were lighted up by the morning rays. A noble pile of rock and heather is that mountain, and well named Ben Mhor, or the Big Mountain—not a triton amongst minnows, but a triton amongst tritons. The golden eagle, to add grandeur to the scene, was sweeping through the sky high above me, and apparently eyeing my canine companion with mingled curiosity and appetite. Once or twice in his circles he came so near that I was half inclined to send a rifle-ball at him, but as often as I stopped my walk with this intention, the noble bird wheeled off again, and at last, remembering his breakfast hour was past, flew off in a straight line at a great height towards the loch to the north of us, where he probably recollected having seen some dead or sickly sheep during his flight homewards the evening before.

I had several hours to spare before the time of meeting Donald, so I diverged here and there, wherever I thought it likely I should find deer, and then kept a northerly course in order to look at some burns and grassy ground near the loch, according to Malcolm's advice. The loch itself was bright and beautiful, and the small islands on it looked like emeralds set in silver. With my glass I could distinguish eight or nine wild geese, as they ruffled the water in their morning gambols, having probably just returned from grazing on the short green grass that grew on different spots near the water's edge. These grassy places were the sites of former habitations, and were still marked by the line of crumbled walls, now the constant resort of the few wild geese that breed every year on the lonely and unvisited islands of the loch.

Below me there was a capital flat for deer, a long sloping valley with a winding burn flowing through the middle, along the banks of which were grassy spots where they constantly fed. I searched this long and carefully with my glass, but saw nothing excepting a few small companies of sheep which were feeding in different flocks about the valley. So famous, however, was this place as the resort of deer, that I took good care not to show myself, and crawled carefully into a hollow way, which, leading to the edge of the burn, would enable me to walk almost unseen for a long distance, and I thought that there might still be deer feeding in some bend of the watercourse, where they had escaped my search. Before I had walked many hundred yards down the course

of the burn, I saw such traces as convinced me they had been feeding there within a few hours ; so arranging my plaid and rifle I walked stealthily and slowly onwards, expecting to see them every moment. The nature of the ground was such that I might come on them quite unperceived ; the dog, too, showed symptoms of scenting something, putting his nose to the tracks and then looking wistfully in my face, watching every movement of my rifle. The inquiring expression of his face was perfect : whenever I stopped to look over or around some projecting angle of rock, he kept his eyes fixed on my face, as if to read in it whether my search was successful or not. A deer-stalker in the situation I was in would make a good subject for a painter. I wound my way silently and slowly through the broken rock and stone which formed the bed of the burn, showing in their piled up confusion that the water must at some times rage and rush with the fury and power of an Alpine torrent, though now it danced merrily along, rippling through the stones and forming tiny pools here and there, where it had not strength enough to break through the accumulated sand and gravel which dammed up its feeble stream. Dressed in grey, and surrounded with grey stone on every side, I was as little conspicuous as it was possible to be, and there was just enough ripple in the stream and its thousand miniature cascades to drown the sound of my footsteps, whenever I inadvertently put my foot on any stone that grated or slipped below me. The only thing that annoyed me was an occasional sheep that would see me from the bank above, and by running off in a startled manner was likely to warn the deer, if there were any ahead of me, of the vicinity of an enemy. I had continued this course for some distance, when just as I began to propose to myself turning off in order to cross the valley to look over the next height, and had made up my mind that the deer whose recent traces I had seen must have slipped away unobserved,—just then, on turning a corner, I caught a momentary glimpse of the hind-quarters of one of the wished-for animals walking slowly round a turn in the burn. I stopped, fearing they had seen or heard me, and I expected to see them leap out of the hollow and make away across the valley ; but not seeing this happen, I walked carefully on, and came in view of nine deer, hinds and calves, who were feeding quietly on a little piece of table-land close to the burn. I also saw the long ears of another appearing beyond

and above the rest, evidently being on the look-out. They seemed to have no suspicion of an enemy, and when they stopped to gaze about them their heads were turned more towards the plain around than to the course of the burn. The sentry, too, was seemingly occupied with looking out in every direction excepting where I was. They were not more than two hundred yards off, and I judged that by advancing quickly the moment that they turned the next corner, I should be able to get unperceived within forty or fifty yards. The single hind had disappeared, too, having gone over a small rise. I put on a new copper cap, and felt sure of an easy shot; the dog, though he did not see the deer, perfectly understood what was going on, and seemed afraid to breathe lest he should be heard. Amongst the herd were two fine barren hinds, both in capital condition. I did not care which of the two I might kill, but determined to have one, and was already beginning to reckon on Donald's delight at my luck in getting a fine hind as well as the stag I had killed yesterday. All the hinds had now gone out of sight, and I moved on. At that very moment the sentry hind, a long-legged, ragged, donkey-like beast, came back to the mound where she had been before, and her sharp eyes instantly detected me. Never did unlucky wight, caught in the very act of doing what he least wished should be known, feel, or, I dare say, look so taken aback as I was. I stood motionless for a moment, hoping that even HER eyesight might be deceived by my grey dress, but it was too late; giving a snort of alarm she was instantly out of sight. I ran forwards, trusting to be in time for a running shot at some straggler, and came in view of the whole troop galloping away, a tolerably long shot off, but still within range, and affording a fair broadside mark as they went along in single file to gain the more level ground. I of course pulled up, and took a deliberate aim at one of the fat hinds. She afforded me a fair enough chance, but I saw, the moment I pulled the trigger, that I had missed her. The ball struck and splintered a rock, and must have passed within a few inches of the top of her shoulder. I saw my error, which was that, miscalculating the distance, I had fired a little too high. However, it was too late to remedy it; so I stood quietly watching with a kind of vague hope that my ball might have passed through her shoulder, though in reality I was sure this was not the case. They never stopped till they

reached the very summit of one of the heights that inclosed the valley, and then they all halted in a group for two or three minutes, standing in clear and strong relief between me and the sky. After looking back for a short time towards the point of alarm, they disappeared over the top of the hill, and I reloaded my rifle, and then went to examine the exact spot where my ball had struck. Judging from the height it was from the ground, I saw the hind had had a very narrow escape, and muttered to myself, "Not a bad shot after all, though unlucky; well, I'm glad it was not a fine stag—never mind the hinds." It's pleasant to find consolation—"rebus in adversis;" my dog in the meantime scented about a good deal, and seemed to wonder that I had missed.

I now turned off out of my stony path, and walked across a long tract of easy ground. There were several likely spots in my way, but no deer were to be found; and an hour before my time I arrived at the trysting-place, which was a peculiarly-shaped large rock, standing in the midst of a great extent of ground covered with grey stones, and rocks of a similar description, but all much smaller. The rock itself rejoiced in a Gaelic name signifying the "Devil's Stone." It was a curious spot—a wide and gentle slope of a hill perfectly covered with these grey stones, looking as if they had dropped in a shower from the clouds. They ended abruptly near the foot of the hill, and formed almost a straight line, as if some giant workman had done his best to clear the remainder of the slope, and had picked all the stones off that part, as children do off a grass field. Upwards, towards the top of the hill, they increased, if possible, in number, and the summit appeared like one mass of rock. Through all this desolation of stone there were several strips of heather, or withered-looking grass, not much wider, however, than footpaths. They served as passes for any sheep and deer which might fancy journeying through them.

I reached my point of rendezvous, and sat down to wait patiently for Donald, with my face turned in the direction whence he was to arrive. I knew that, unless detained by any quite unforeseen accident, he would arrive rather before than after his time, as he was to bring me something in the shape of luncheon; the liquid part of which I was confident he would not forget.

I waited some time in this solitude, without hearing or seeing any living creature to enliven the dreary landscape

before me, with the exception of a pair of ravens who passed at no great height above me, uttering their harsh croaks of ill omen as they winged their way in a direct course, to feast probably on the remains of some dead sheep or deer.

My attention was suddenly roused, however, by hearing a couple of shots in quick succession, the sound coming from the direction in which I expected Donald. As the reports did not appear to be at any great distance, I rose with the intention of going to meet him; though I could not understand what he was shooting at, it being quite against both his and my ideas of propriety that he should hunt the very ground over which I intended to beat homewards. On second thoughts, I fancied that he had fired off his gun to warn me of his approach; but, just as I was passing these things over in my head, I saw a stag of good size come in view from the direction in which I had heard the shots. Down I dropped instantly behind a rock, as the deer was coming straight towards me. As he approached, I saw that the poor beast was hard hit. One of his forelegs was broken, and swinging about in a miserable manner, and he had also one of his horns broken off a few inches above his head; altogether he seemed in a most pitiable state. Before he came within two hundred yards of me he turned off, and I watched him as he scrambled along on three legs painfully and slowly, stopping frequently to look back, or to smell at the blood that was trickling down his sides. I could plainly see that he was also struck somewhere about the middle of his body, as well as on the horn and leg, and was now bleeding fast. It then occurred to me that Donald had fallen in with a lame stag, and had thought it best to do what he could towards killing him with my gun. Bullets he always took with him by my orders. The stag continued his painful march, and I would have given much to have been within reach to put an end to the poor brute's misery. He twice lay down on a grassy spot amongst the rocks, having first looked anxiously and fearfully round him; but seemingly the attitude of lying was more painful to him than moving slowly on. I remembered then a theory of Donald's, that a deer never lies down when shot through the liver, but continues moving, or at any rate standing, till he dies. How far this opinion was correct I never had a good opportunity of proving. The deer before me, having found that lying down gave him no relief, continued moving, but still slowly

and with evident difficulty. Once he stopped and stood in a pitiful attitude, trembling all over, and moving his head up and down as if oppressed with deadly sickness. After this he seemed to recover slightly, and, standing erect, gazed with care and anxiety in every direction; then, as if determined to make one more effort for his life, set off in a broken trot. He had been winding about amongst the rocks all the time I had been watching him, seldom more than two hundred yards from me, and sometimes so near that I was half tempted to try a shot at him; but I was always in hopes of getting within surer range, and did not fire. He now trotted off about three hundred yards, where there was a small black pool of water. Into this he went; it did not at first reach higher than his knees. Just then Donald appeared in view, coming slowly and cautiously over the hill, and leading a pointer in a string. I saw that the dog was tracking the deer. It was a large powerful dog, of great size and strength—one of the finest, if not quite the finest built dog of the kind that I had ever possessed or seen. Having been at the death of one or two deer, he had taken a mighty fancy to the scent of a bleeding stag, and tracked true and keenly. I sat quiet to watch him and the old Highlander, as they came slowly but surely on the track, with both their noses to the ground; Donald hunting low, in order to be sure that the dog was still right, which he could tell pretty well by the occasional spots of blood on the grey stones, though the ground was too hard most of the way to show the mark of the foot. Now and then they seemed quite thrown out for a minute or so; this I saw was generally occasioned by Donald's want of judgment: the dog, though he strained on the string, kept the track wonderfully well in every turn. The poor object of their chase, when he first saw his enemies appear, gave a sudden start, and seemed inclined to make off; but on second thoughts he stopped short again, and, lowering his head and neck, crouched in the water, as if trusting to the surrounding rocks for concealment; and there the poor animal remained, with stooping horns, perfectly motionless, but evidently with every nerve and sense on the alert, listening for the nearer approach of his enemies. For my own part, I became quite interested in watching Donald and the dog; I knew that the stag was safely ours, as he could not leave the pool without coming into full view, and having to depend on his speed for safety, which in his enfeebled state

was the last thing he would like to do. Donald looked anxiously round him sometimes, as if he hoped to see me, and as if he expected to hear my rifle every moment, since he was well aware that our time of meeting was past, and that I was pretty sure not to be far off. When he came near the "Devil's Stone" he checked the dog, and came to a determined halt, hesitating whether to continue tracking the stag, or to wait for my appearance and assistance; he took a long look too at the country far beyond where the animal really was. It was amusing to see the old fellow, as he sat within eighty yards of me, perfectly unconscious that the stag was so near him, and that I was still nearer. The whole thing too, showed the great necessity of always having a good tracking dog out when deer-stalking; for here was a mortally-struck stag lying concealed, where a dozen men might have passed within a few yards without seeing him. I thought it time to finish the business, and gave a low whistle to warn Donald of my neighbourhood before I stirred, as I thought it not at all unlikely that he would fire blindly at the first moving thing he saw amongst the rocks in his present excited state. He started and stared round him. I saw that the deer only crouched the lower, and would not move; so, whistling again, I stood up. "The Lord keep us, Sir, but you flegged me just awful!" said Donald. "But did your Honour see a stag come this way?" I told him that I had, and that he had passed on; but I did not say how far he had gone. The old man was annoyed in no slight degree at the information; and on my questioning him how he had got at the deer, &c., he told me that, as he came to meet me, he had seen a crippled stag coming slowly over the ground exactly towards him; and that having stooped down and loaded the gun he carried as quickly as he could, he had waited till the stag passed within twenty yards of him; that he then fired both barrels, one at his head and neck; that one ball had broken off a portion of the animal's horn, while the other had passed through his body, tumbling him over for a moment; but that he had quickly recovered and made off in my direction, and was probably now in the burn over the next hill. "But you are aye smiling, Sir; and I ken weel that you've seen more of the brute than you tell me." I told the old man exactly where he was; and having made him quite understand the very rock he was behind, I gave him the rifle to finish the work he had commenced, while I

sat down with the two dogs in full view of the pool, in order to keep the attention of the stag occupied.

"Now then, Donald, take care; don't be in a hurry, and hit him in the heart or the head."

"No fear, no fear; if I put out," said Donald, "ye needna mind, the beast is as gude as killed already."

Then taking a prodigious spoonful of snuff to clear his brain, and divesting himself of his game-bag and other encumbrances, he set off. He reached a mound within thirty yards of the stag, and lying flat on his stomach, with his rifle resting on the bank, he aimed long and steadily; then, with sundry kicks and contortions, screwing himself into an attitude that pleased him more, he took another aim, and then a good strong pull at the trigger—but in vain, as he had not cocked the rifle. Without taking it off the rest over the bank, he pulled back the hammer and fired instantly, missing the stag entirely. Donald was too astonished to move; but not so the stag, who jumped up and made off—going, however, so stiffly and lamely, that I saw the dogs must bring him to immediately. So I let them go, and in a very short time they had the poor beast on the ground, and were both fixed on him like leeches, the bull-dog on his throat, and the pointer worrying at his shoulder.

"Bravo, Donald;—well missed!" I could not help calling out as I passed him, running as hard as I could to help the dogs. The old man was not long in joining me; and the dogs were soon got off. The stag was bled, and then examined all over to see where he had been struck.

"'Deed, Sir," said Donald, pointing to the rifle, "she is as gleg and kittle to handle as ——"

Here he paused as if at a dead loss for a simile; which I was obliged to help him to at last by suggesting, "As your own wife, Donald." At which he indulged in a low inward chuckle and a pinch of snuff, without, however, denying the "soft impeachment."

On looking at the stag, we found that he had evidently been very lately shot at, and that one of his forelegs was broken above the knee—the bone smashed entirely, and the leg hanging on by the skin, which would have soon worn through; the animal, having lost the incumbrance of the broken limb, would soon, if left in quiet, have entirely recovered. We prepared our game for being "left till called for," and sat down to our luncheon. My account to Donald

of the death of my other stag was interrupted by a most desperate battle between the dogs, who had fallen out over the dead body; and being pretty well matched in size and courage, we had great difficulty in reducing them to order, and compelling them to keep the peace.

I had a pleasant though not very bloody afternoon's shooting going home, killing seven brace of wild-flying grouse, a mallard, and two blackcocks. The night had set in before we were half way through the woods in which the last two or three miles of our road lay; we could hear numberless owls hooting and calling on the tops of old larch-trees. Everything else was as still as death.

"'Deed, Sir, that's no canny!" exclaimed my companion, as an owl with peculiar vigour of lungs uttered his wild cry close to us, and then flitting past our faces, alighted on the opposite side of the avenue we were walking along, and recommenced his song of bad omen. "If it wasn't so dark, I'd empty the gun into his ugly craig." However, as it *was* so dark, the owl escaped being sacrificed to Donald's dislike this time; and we soon reached the house, where the comforts of my own dressing-room were by no means unacceptable after so long an absence from razor, brushes, &c.

EXTRACTS FROM NOTE-BOOKS.

NOTES ON NATURAL HISTORY AND ON SHOOTING.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Length of Life of Birds—The Eagle—Swan—Geese—Falcons—Fowls—Pigeons—Small Birds—Great age of Eagles and Foxes—Red-Deer—Destruction of Old Stags—Roe—Sheep—Rifles; size of their bore—Double-barrelled Rifles—Size of Small Shot—Cartridges—Impossibility of laying down general rules—Necessity of discretion in all writers on Natural History.

It is not easy to determine the length of years bestowed on any of the wild animals. There are no specific and well-ascertained data on which to form a valid opinion. On all such subjects the most positive *assertions* are often so ill supported by *facts*, that the naturalist should be most careful and guarded as to the evidence on which he founds his opinion. It seems, however, reasonable to suppose that the age attained by all animals bears a certain proportion to the time which they take in coming to their maturity in size and strength.

Judging by this criterion, the eagle may be set down as one of the longest lived of our British birds; as he certainly does not arrive at the full maturity of his plumage for some years. On the other hand, the swan puts on her white feathers at her first moulting, yet is said to live to a very great age; and there are well-authenticated instances that this is the fact. Geese, too, live to a most patriarchal age. The period of life of tame falcons does not exceed eight to ten years—at least so I am assured by some of my acquaintances who have kept these birds. A wild hawk, barring accidents from shot or trap, has, probably, a better chance of longevity than a domesticated bird, however carefully the latter may be tended, as it is almost impossible to hit upon the exact quantity, quality, and variety of food which best conduces to their health, or to give tame birds as large a share of exercise

and bodily exertion as in their wild state they would be constrained to take in pursuit of their daily prey. Common fowls live to the age of ten or twelve years, but become useless and rheumatic after six or eight. Such, also, is the case with pigeons. I knew of a pair who lived for fifteen years, but they were barren for some years before their death.

The length of life of small birds is probably less: but it is difficult to form an accurate opinion on this point; inasmuch as any deductions founded on canaries or goldfinches in a state of confinement must be fallacious, as all caged birds are subject to numerous diseases, from over-eating, from improper and too little varied food, and a thousand other causes, which do not affect those who live in a state of natural and healthful liberty.

It is a curious fact, that one scarcely ever finds the dead body of a wild bird or animal whose death appears to have been caused by old age or any other natural cause. Nor can this result from the fact of their being consumed immediately by animals of prey, as we constantly meet with the bodies of birds who have been killed by wounds from shot, &c. Either (as donkeys and postboys are said to do) the wild animals on the approach of death creep into hidden corners of the earth, or nearly all of them, before they reach extreme old age, are cut off by their common enemy, mankind, or serve as food to birds and beasts of prey.

I have, however, killed both eagles and foxes who bore unmistakeable marks of extreme old age; the plumage of the former being light coloured, thin, and worn; so worn, indeed, as to lead one to suppose that the bird could not have moulted for several seasons, and the faces of the latter being grey and their jaws nearly toothless: yet they were still in good, and even fat condition. In animals, age and cunning supply the place of strength and activity; so that the eagle and fox are still able to live well, even when they have arrived at the most advanced age assigned to them.

Very old deer become light-coloured and greyish, especially about the head and neck, and have a bleached and worn-looking appearance over their whole body. Their horns, also, lose much of their rich appearance both as to colour and size, becoming not only smaller, but also decreasing in the number of their points. The Highlanders assign a great age to the red deer; indeed they seem to suppose that it has no limit, save a rifle ball; and they tell wonderful stories of famous

stags, who have been seen and known for a long series of years in certain districts. Though these accounts are doubtless much exaggerated, it is tolerably certain that their life extends to from twenty to thirty years. I do not imagine that in these days stags have much chance of reaching that term. At the age of seven or eight years, the animal having arrived at full perfection as to size and beauty of antler, they are marked down for destruction by the numerous sportsmen who wage war against them in every part of the north of the island. Their numbers in certain preserved districts have, no doubt, increased to a great extent; but very few of the fine, rugged, and far-stretching antlers, which adorn the halls of many of the old houses in the Highlands, are now to be met with on living deer. Where not brought down by the licensed sportsman, a fine-headed stag has now so high a premium offered on his life in the price given for horns, that he is sure to fall by the gun of some poacher or shepherd. I have known as large a sum as five guineas given for a stag's head; and when this is the case, nothing else can be expected but that every stag whose horns are peculiarly fine, will be killed. I have occasionally shot roebucks, and still oftener does, showing by their size, colour, length of hoofs, &c., that they had reached a tolerable old age: but, like all persecuted animals, the chance of their attaining their full extent of days is so slight as scarcely to give us the means of ascertaining how long they would live if secure from danger.

Sheep after seven or eight years lose their teeth, more or less, and show symptoms of their best days being past. But these, like all other domesticated animals, do not afford a good criterion to judge by, as they are all under an artificial system as to food and manner of living, which makes them, like man, subject to many diseases and causes of decay, which would not affect them if they were in a state of nature.

In populous countries such as Britain, it may fairly be supposed that extremely few wild animals or birds reach their full period of life. Although some kinds are carefully preserved here and there, they are only preserved, like sheep or fowls, to be the more conveniently killed when required; and where there is no restriction to shooting and destroying the *feræ naturæ* of the country, the extensive trade carried on throughout the kingdom in all the shops where guns and powder and shot are sold, proves what numbers must be

destroyed. Added to this, guns and rifles are now so well made as to be much more destructive weapons than formerly. No reasonable person would wish to be able to kill a bird at a greater distance than his fowling-piece now enables him to do; and a modern rifle carries correctly quite as far as a man can see clearly enough to aim with nicety at a small object.

In shooting with the rifle at large animals, such as deer, a good-sized ball is, for several reasons, a very great desideratum. In the first place, the larger the ball the greater is its force. A ball of 11 bore smashes through a substance which would stop the ball of a pea-rifle, unless the latter is aimed at and strikes some vital part. The animal struck carries it away, and either pines wounded for a long time, or dies in some concealed place, where it is lost to the shooter. Also, the wound made by a small ball will frequently close up again immediately, enabling the deer to escape; or the ball, instead of breaking a bone, is stopped by it: and it should be remembered, that when you shoot at an animal, the most merciful way of doing so is with a weapon which *kills* instead of merely *wounding* it. Good single-barrelled rifles can easily be procured; but to get a trustworthy double rifle the sportsman must go to one of the first-rate gunmakers, and pay a first-rate price. By altering the sights of a single-barrelled rifle any person, knowing the commonest elements of shooting, can make it carry correctly a hundred yards or more; but a double rifle, if the axis of the two barrels are not exactly parallel, can only be adjusted by taking it to pieces again and again, until the barrels shall lie so evenly together, that at a hundred yards the two balls strike within an inch of each other. As it is almost impossible for the most skilful gunsmith to join the two barrels so correctly *at first* as to attain this result, he has to try them repeatedly, taking his work to pieces again and again, until he is quite satisfied with his performance. All this must, of course, add to the expense; but it is money well expended if, after all, a double-barrelled rifle does shoot perfectly true. Another important point which should be borne in mind with regard to rifles is, that those of very small bore do not carry so true for long shots as larger ones.

It is difficult to lay down any specific rule as to the most effective size of small shot for shooting game and wild fowl. Some sportsmen strenuously assert that one particular

number is the *only right* kind, or indeed the only kind that ought to be used; others tell you quite a different story. For my own part I consider that for all flying game the shooter should rather be inclined to small sizes than large. No. 7, for instance, kills partridges and even grouse more effectively than a larger size. For wild-duck shooting, too, where you shoot at single birds, No. 5, or even No. 6, appear to me to kill oftener than the larger sizes more generally used. I am, indeed, convinced, that small shot works its way better than large through the down and feathers; the latter, notwithstanding its superior force, gets rolled up in the down, while the former cuts through it, and kills the bird. For flocks of ducks larger shot may be used; but even then too large sizes do less execution than smaller ones. Swans and geese require No. 1 or No. 2, as smaller shot seldom breaks a wing of these birds; but cartridges are the most effective, and then you may use No. 3 at single geese with tolerable certainty. Eley's cartridges, with large shot, such as B.B. or S.S.G., in them, sometimes kill at prodigious distances, but are very apt to "*ball*" completely, and deceive the shooter. Indeed, all the green cartridges have this defect; owing to which the bird is either missed entirely or blown to pieces. Several good shots of my acquaintance can never succeed well with wire-cartridges: they certainly require a different style of shooting from loose shot, as they not only shoot slower, but also are very much inclined to throw the shot low; and in order to use cartridges with success these two facts should be constantly borne in mind.

I find that the "*yellow cartridge*," which is made without any wire, answers extremely well for grouse shooting, or when common game is wild, as they keep the shot close together, but without balling to any great extent. They are very excellent, too, for rabbits, who generally require all the shot which the sportsman can give them. Late in the season, hares certainly ought not to be shot at with a size under No. 4: smaller shot will not break their bones sufficiently to stop them at once, excepting when the animal is crossing you. Different guns, however, carry effectively different sized shot; and therefore the same rules do not apply to all. Some guns also shoot cartridges in a very different manner from others; and I should wish it to be clearly understood that I do not lay down these suggestions as infallible rules, but merely as the result of my own

experience, hoping that some of my readers may profit by them. In all matters of this sort I consider that much more information is gained by the reader, if an author is content simply to mark down ascertained facts. If too much decision is assumed, and mere hearsay assertions are put down as "*facts*"—if he lays down as general rules what may be applicable only to particular cases—perhaps solely to his own, an author will on this subject, as on most others, do more harm than good. "*Quot homines, tot sententiæ*;" and although half of what I write may probably not meet the ideas of many of my readers, I offer it all, leaving it to every one to extract what is applicable to his own pursuits, and hoping that there may be few who will not find some hint or other, or some chance bit of information which may aid them in their amusements.

Amongst the mass of books written on subjects of natural history, it is curious to see the numberless errors committed, and the false inferences drawn, by superficial observers, or by persons who set down as facts not merely what they actually see, but what they fancy must or ought to be; and who describe as ascertained facts things of which they know nothing more than that they seem to be possible, and may be *probable*. This is a system of writing which cannot be sufficiently reprobated, as tending to establish most erroneous and mistaken ideas. Every student of nature and of the habits and manners of living creatures, even of those which are apparently the most insignificant and uninteresting, must know that the truest facts concerning them are often much more marvellous than anything he would dare to invent; and that a writer on such subjects, who wishes to embellish his book with startling and surprising anecdotes, will best attain his object by sticking closely to the plain reality.

It is an old, and oft-repeated, saying, that "Truth is stranger than fiction;" and it is especially so in treating of Nature and her productions, whether we direct our attention to animals of the largest size, and highest order of intelligence and instinct, or to the equally astonishing habits and means of living displayed by the smallest insects and reptiles.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Disease amongst Grouse ; difficulty of assigning its cause—Supply of Grouse to Poulterers—Netting game, legal and illegal—Disguised Poachers—Game-Laws—Preserves—Criminality of Poachers—Epidemics amongst Hares, &c.—Black Game—Hybrids—Woodpigeons—Geese—Sentinels.

It is difficult, I ought perhaps to say impossible, to understand the cause and origin of what the Highland keepers call "the disease" amongst grouse. For the last few years it has in several districts almost swept away these birds; so much so that scarcely a young bird is to be found, and very few old ones. Some persons assign one thing as the cause of this and some another, all plausible, but all on investigation equally unsatisfactory. One keeper will tell you that the heather "is too short;" another, that "it is too long;" one, that the hills have been too wet during the spring; and another, that the weather was too dry: in fact, the most experienced persons are all at fault. For my own part I conceive that it is some epidemic which cuts off the birds indiscriminately in wet and dry, cold and hot weather, without reference to state of ground or climate. The worst feature of the case is, that as yet nothing approaching to a cure or preventive has been discovered. I should be very much inclined in a diseased district to shoot hard for a season, instead of sparing the survivors; and *then* to give the grouse a year or two of entire rest and immunity from dog and gun. If the hills are let to strangers from a distance during a scarcity of this kind, it is natural to expect that, having no interest in them beyond the season, and paying a considerable rent, they will shoot as many birds as they can, without thinking of the future; and as in general the grounds are each year let to new tenants, the same thing will occur again and again until the birds are nearly extinct.

Luckily in favourable seasons and on good ground grouse seem to grow and increase almost like the heather among which they dwell, and the hills soon get stocked again. The number of grouse sent to the markets in London, and in all the large towns in England, from the beginning of August to the end of the season, is perfectly astonishing; and indeed until March any quantity of grouse can be procured from the poulterers and game dealers. Immense must be the slaughter to afford this supply: the greatest portion are shot;

but in some districts considerable numbers are caught with horse-hair snares set upon the sheaves of corn. Netting does not seem to succeed to any great extent, although it has frequently been tried by poachers. I confess that I do not see why netting game should be considered a more destructive and poaching-like system than shooting it—I mean of course if it is carried on legitimately and as an amusement. I admit that the whole covey or pack is caught at once, but that they should all of them have their necks wrung is by no means a necessary *sequitur*. There is, also, a great degree of skill and perfect training required in the “setting dog,” which gives much interest to this way of sporting. It should be borne in mind also, that when a covey of partridges is caught they are not injured, and the sportsman can set at liberty all that he does not require; whereas in shooting, very many birds are, of necessity, uselessly wounded and left to perish.

The system of netting partridges at night time, as it is carried on by the poachers in some parts of England, is most destructive; and unless checked is certain to clear the country of all its birds. The only way to prevent this silent and wholesale robbery is to stake and bush the grass-fields. Partridges, when undisturbed, roost, or rather sleep, regularly in the smoothest grass or barest stubble. They seem to feel more security with an open expanse around them than in any kind of concealment. The whole covey sits crouched in a space that might almost be covered with a hat, so closely are they huddled together. After having made their evening meal in the stubbles, which they always do in the autumn and winter, between the hours of three and five, the old birds call their brood and collect them together; they then fly off to some grass field or other very bare ground, and having run about, apparently in play, for a little while, as soon as the light begins to fail, they fly off to some favourite spot in the field, and huddling up together in a furrow, take up their quarters for the night. Unluckily all this is done with a great deal of noise; the birds constantly calling to, and answering each other, and running to and fro with their heads most conspicuously erect, thus plainly showing the netting-poacher, who is sure to be on the look-out, where he may expect the best luck during the night. While this work is being carried on, you may see some fellow, often dressed more like a schoolmaster than a poacher, lounging

listlessly about the lanes, leaning against the gates and smoking his pipe. You never suspect that any sporting propensities can be concealed under the high-crowned beaver and swallow-tailed coat of this classical-looking gentleman, who seems to be merely enjoying the beauty of the evening, although all the while he is watching with the eyes of a lynx the unsuspecting partridges as they run about calling to each other preparatory to going to roost. The fellow is thus able to form a pretty good guess as to where half-a-dozen coveys may be netted; and he returns to his confederate, who in the meantime has been equally usefully employed at some alehouse or elsewhere in preparing and mending the nets. "Dressing" for the occasion, as it is termed, is now become by no means an uncommon practice near large towns in England, and many a pheasant preserve is laid waste by Methodist parson-like fellows, whose black coat-pockets and clerical-looking hats contain, instead of sermons, neatly coiled piles of horsehair nooses ready tied on a line long enough to be run across a large extent of cover, at the favourable moment when the keeper, of whom they have just asked the way to the rectory, has gone about his business in some other direction.

By such means as these a great part of the game is obtained which we see hung up in such immense quantities in all the poulterers' shops. A gamekeeper cannot be too curious and inquisitive as to the business and movements of all strangers about his ground, whether dressed in a fustian jacket and leather leggings, in a rusty suit of black, or in a blue swallow-tail with gilt buttons. By watching unseen an idler of this sort, a keeper may frequently find out some projected manœuvre against his pheasants and partridges.

There has been of late a great cry out against game and game-laws, gamekeepers and game preservers. In fact, the mere word "game" is sufficient to excite the bilious indignation of half the newspapers in the United Kingdom, and more especially of those whose claims to popularity are founded on the loudness and virulence of their abuse of what they term "the aristocracy of the kingdom."

I am very far from being an advocate for carrying out the system of preserving game to the extent which is frequently done, where woods as full of pheasants as a poultry-yard is of chickens afford no real sport, and where, instead of amusement of hunting for and finding your game, your only

employment is the mere act of shooting them, the birds and hares being as tame and as easy to kill as so many domestic fowls. At the same time, if proprietors like to go to the expense and trouble of keeping innumerable pheasants and hares, I cannot see why they should not be allowed to indulge their taste, without being held up to public censure by those whose taste happens to be different, as is so frequently the case.

It is not the farmers who complain of the game: they have a fair and I believe a legal right to compensation for all the mischief it does them; and I do not think that this claim is often, if ever, refused to be acknowledged by the game preserver. In fact, it is his interest to keep on good terms with the occupier of the land, even if his sense of justice did not induce him to do so, as the farmer and tenant are able to destroy more game, in the shape of eggs and young birds, during the breeding season, than the proprietor and all his friends could do in a twelvemonth. They can do this, too, without exposing themselves to any risk of paying penalty for infraction of the game-laws. As far as my own experience extends, I have never found tenants looking upon the preservation of game as so great a nuisance and source of loss as they are represented to do by many writers on the subject, who for the most part advance as facts statements which are either utterly untrue, or at the best are twisted and exaggerated to serve their own purposes. Leases are always entered into by farmers with their eyes well open to every chance of loss which they are likely to sustain from the game, and stipulations are made accordingly. In fact, the proprietor of the game is almost invariably the person who, directly or indirectly, pays for its keep: this price it is right that he should pay for his amusement, and the cases I believe are very rare in which any objection is made to doing so.

In considering this subject, it should also be borne in mind that in these days game is a source of profit and income to so many persons, that it ought to be under legal protection, as much so as any other kind of property. The trespasser in pursuit of game renders himself liable to certain penalties with as perfect a knowledge of the risk he runs as the man who steals from the hen-roost. It is often argued that poaching is the first step to many worse crimes; so is picking pockets. Pheasants are great temptations, and so are

pocket-handkerchiefs; and a man has as much right to breed pheasants in his woods, as to walk down the Strand with a silk pocket-handkerchief in his pocket. It is very true that the pheasant stealer may become a highwayman, and in like manner the picker of pockets may become a burglar; but in neither case should the minor crime be permitted to go unpunished in a vain hope of decreasing the frequency of the greater. Men are very seldom impelled by actual want to take up poaching as a trade; they are almost always led to it by a natural lawlessness of disposition and a disinclination to labour, or else by a wish to earn the means of indulging in drinking and low profligacy, in the same manner as the young Levi or Moses who picks your pocket spends the proceeds of his booty in some den of infamy in town. I allude, of course, in all I have said, not to the illegal follower of game who is led to do wrong by sportsman-like feelings, but to the desperate and systematic poacher who acts from mere love of gain and utter contempt of right and law, and who too frequently would as soon maltreat or kill a game-keeper who performs his honest duty, as he would shoot a hare. The savage encounters that occasionally occur are invariably commenced by the most lawless and dissolute class of poachers, whose sole object is plunder, and who have not a particle of that love of sport in their composition which so frequently leads the comparatively blameless trespasser into the hands of the law.

I have entered perhaps too far into a worn-out and unpleasant subject, but I have been led to do so by the honest conviction that, *in property of this sort at least*, every man has a right to "do what he likes with his own," provided his neighbour does not suffer thereby.

Rabbits and hares are, like winged game, subject to epidemics, which frequently carry off great numbers. Their diseases can generally be traced to the wet weather or other obvious causes, though sometimes, indeed, these animals disappear almost entirely from a district without any ostensible cause: whether they migrate or perish by disease is a mystery.

Of late years the mountain-hares in Scotland have increased in some places to an almost incredible degree, and hare-shooting in the mountains has occasionally taken the place of grouse-shooting, the birds having died off, while the hares have flourished. Grouse and the mountain-hare feed

on very nearly the same food. This circumstance tends to corroborate the supposition that the epidemic amongst grouse is by no means occasioned by any failure in the growth of the heather.

In many parts of Scotland an old blackcock is almost uneatable, his flesh having so strong a flavour of juniper: where, however, this plant does not abound, the black game, feeding on grain and other seeds, are as good for the table as any other kind of game. Although the blackcock and capercaillie frequently breed together, and mules between the pheasant and black grouse are, though rare, occasionally seen, I have very rarely found a well-authenticated case of a mule bird bred between the grouse and blackcock being killed. In most instances in which birds supposed to be hybrids between these two species have fallen under my observation, they appeared to me to be merely greyhens, whose plumage had become like that of the cock. I have seen birds of this kind in the Edinburgh Museum and elsewhere, and I saw one killed this autumn (1848), which had very much the appearance of a hybrid, but on closer examination I came to the conclusion that it was merely an old greyhen, who had changed her appearance as the hen-pheasant does. This latter bird we all know is very frequently killed in different stages of change towards the male plumage. The same is the case with the common domestic fowl and the peahen. It is difficult to account for the cause of this transformation. We know that it does not arise from any disease or ill-health, as the birds in their borrowed plumage are always in as good condition as any others.

It is very rare indeed to find any wild animal subject to illness, with the exception of the epidemics before alluded to. Unless they are wounded and unable to hunt for their own food, all wild birds and animals keep themselves plump and healthy. The woodpigeon is indeed frequently subject to a kind of cancer and growth on their bills and about the eyes, which eventually destroys them; but I attribute this disease to feeding on the beech-mast, which is probably too heating a food for the young birds. The old woodpigeons are seldom if ever attacked by this disease, notwithstanding their great fondness for beech-mast and acorns.

Woodpigeons are not so much valued for the larder as they deserve to be. They are excellent eating at all seasons,

excepting when driven by snow to feed on the turnip leaves. Since the destruction of vermin and the increase of fir plantations, they have grown very numerous in many parts of the country, where, a few years ago, they were comparatively rare. It is, however, difficult to kill many of them during the winter and autumn, when they are collected in flocks, their safety resulting rather from their timidity than from any excess of cunning.

Most birds, while feeding in flocks, appoint sentinels, whose duties appear to be perfectly understood, as well by the guards as by the guarded: red-deer, too, whilst resting, usually place a young stag as sentinel, and do not allow him to lie down or leave off his vigilant watching, which often lasts a considerable time. Those at rest appear to be perfectly unconcerned and at their ease, and to depend entirely on the watchful eyes and ears of their sentry.

In the same way wild geese, while feeding on the open fields, invariably leave one bird to keep watch, and most faithfully does she perform this duty. Keeping on some high spot of the field, she stands with neck perfectly erect, watching on all sides, and listening to every sound far or near. Nor does she attempt to snatch at a single grain, however hungry she may be, till one of her comrades thinks fit to relieve her guard; and then the former sentinel sets to work at her feeding with an eagerness which shows that her abstinence while on duty was the result, not of want of appetite, but of a proper sense of the important trust imposed on her. If any enemy or the slightest cause of suspicion appears, the sentry utters a low croak, when the whole flock immediately run up to her, and after a short consultation, fly off, leaving the unfortunate sportsman to lament having shown the button of his cap or the muzzle of his gun above the bank of the ditch, along which he had perhaps been creeping, "*suadente diabolo*," for the last half-hour up to his knees in water, well iced to the temperature of a Scotch morning in February. Thus also wild ducks, curlews, crows, and almost all birds when feeding in flocks, leave sentries, on whose vigilance the rest entirely depend, taking no heed of anything around them, but feeding in conscious safety. Nor is it necessary for a cry of alarm to be given, as the flock perfectly understand what is going on by the actions or looks of the one who is watching, distinguishing at once whether the sentry is intent on some sound or object at a

distance, or whether the danger is imminent and pressing. It is not only by the voice and action of birds of *their own* kind that flocks of wild fowl guide their actions: the startled movement or cry of a redshank or peewit is sufficient to put on wing a whole flock of geese or ducks instantaneously, and also to tell exactly from what point the danger is to be apprehended.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Landrail; Arrival and Habits of—Cuckoo—Swift—Associations connected with Birds—Enjoyment of Life by Birds—Falcons—Water-Fowl; their different modes of Swimming—Wild-Fowl shooting—Wounded Ducks—Retrievers; care which should be taken of them—Plumage of Water-Fowl; its imperviousness to wet; the cause and limits of this.

THE landrail is one of the most numerous and most regular of our birds of passage. For several seasons the 1st of May has been the earliest day on which I have noticed them. At first I hear a single bird or two croaking in some small patch of early wheat or long clover: their numbers then increase rapidly every day. In the early morning I see them along the sides of the paths, and more particularly near grassy ditches. The rapidity with which this bird threads its way through thickly-growing clover is astonishing. With head crouched to the ground it glides, in a horizontal position, almost with the quickness of an arrow, scarcely moving the grass as it passes through it. One moment he is at your feet, and the next he is standing far off, with erect head and neck, and croaking with a voice of brass. By the end of May or the beginning of June every field is full of them; and the noise they make during the night time, or after a shower of rain, is incessant. By the middle of August they become quiet; and the corn being high, they are then seldom seen. Before the crops are carried they have almost entirely disappeared, having left the country quietly and unseen. Sometimes during the shooting season a landrail rises in some very unexpected place, and they are then as fat as it is possible for a bird to be. On their first arrival also they are in good condition, till the business of breeding commences, when they become comparatively lean.

Though the voice of the landrail is *per se* so peculiarly harsh and grating, there are few birds whose note falls more pleasantly on my ear—associated as it is with the glad season

of spring and summer. The monotonous cry of the cuckoo has nothing delightful in it beyond recalling to the mind pleasing ideas of spring and woody glades; yet I believe every one listens to this bird with pleasure. From seeing and hearing so many of them about the wild rocks and glens of Scowrie and Assynt, the cuckoo now always brings that rugged district before my eyes, instead of the tranquil groves where I formerly had seen it. The nest, which of all others the knavish cuckoo prefers to lay her eggs in, is that of the titlark; and in Scowrie and Assynt those birds abound.

Another bird, whose cry is invariably associated by me with one kind of locality, is the swift. I never hear the loud scream of this bird without having some well-remembered steeple or other lofty building brought vividly before my mind's eye: thus, also, the martin and swallow recall the recollection of some favourite stream, whose waters abound in trout, and whose banks swarm with the May-fly and grey drake.

The crow of the grouse is as inseparable in my mind from the mountains of Scotland, as the song of the ring-ousel is from its birch-covered glens, or the spring call of the peewit from the marshy meadows.

There is, I think, great pleasure in thus recollecting by the sounds and notes of living animals scenes which the eye has dwelt upon with delight, and so constant is every bird to its own locality, that the associations thus called forth are invariably correct.

In preserving game, quiet and food are the two things to be attended to. No animals will remain in places where they are frequently disturbed; vicinity to favourable feeding-ground is also a *sine quâ non*. In large and extensive tracks of wood where there are miles of unbroken forest, birds are always rare, excepting indeed some of the far wandering hawks, whose strong wings enable them to pass over miles of country with little exertion. Even birds of prey are more inclined to take up their abode near the outskirts of a wood than in its densest solitudes.

In winter large flocks of the long-tailed titmouse, the golden-crested wren, and other birds of similar insect-searching habits, flit from tree to tree, passing in an unbroken multitude for hours together, hanging in every possible attitude from the branches while searching for their minute prey, and enlivening the solitude with their bright wings, and

with their merry chirp, so expressive of pleasure, as they flutter from tree to tree. I believe that all wild birds live in a state of constant enjoyment when unmolested by animals of prey, biped or quadruped, and even then their terror or pain is but of short duration, having no anticipation of the coming evil, or much remembrance of it if fortunately they escape. The snows of winter sometimes indeed shut up their sources of food, but it is rare, at least in this country, that plenty of open ground is not left for the wants of all the wild animals.

The falcon at earliest daybreak, after enjoying for a short time the morning sun, shakes her feathers once or twice, plumes her wings, and then launching herself into the air, passes with straight and direct flight to the most favourable hunting-ground. Some unfortunate grouse or plover is soon struck down. The first act of a falcon on striking and catching a bird is, if any life remains, to dislocate its neck; and thus its pain is immediately over. Oftener, however, the falcon strikes her chase while in the air, killing it perfectly dead instantaneously. Indeed all the long-winged hawks prefer striking their prey in the air, seldom dashing, with the same confidence, at a bird on the ground. Having well filled her crop, the falcon flies back to some favourite stone, or projection of rock on the cliffs, and there sits in a state of quiet satisfaction for the rest of the day, perched in a situation where no danger can approach her unperceived.

There must be great enjoyment too in the flight of the eagle and buzzard, as they soar and float for hours together at a height that makes them appear no bigger than a lark. The latter bird too seems the very personification of happiness, as, uttering its merry and sweet song, it mounts higher and higher till lost to sight.

But no birds seem to enjoy life more than water-fowl; floating without exertion in perfect security in the midst of a calm lake, or riding, as buoyant as a cork, on the waves of the sea.

When looking at wild-fowl on the water, it is generally easy to distinguish what kind they are, even from a great distance. Scarcely any two specimens swim or float in the same manner, and at the same elevation above the surface of the water. Coots and sea-gulls float like bladders, with scarcely any of their body immersed: so much so that it is almost impossible to mistake one of the former at any dis-

tance at which a bird can be distinguished. The divers, such as the cormorant, the black-throated diver and others of the same kind, swim very flat in the water, showing scarcely any part except the top of their back, and their head and neck, which all these birds carry straight and erect, seldom or never bending and arching their throat like ducks or geese. In consequence of their swimming so low in the water it is difficult to kill any of these diving birds, unless you can get at them from a rock or height above them. Widgeon swim rather flat and low in the water. Mallards and teal keep more of their bodies above it, and are in consequence easier to kill while swimming. Pochards, scaup ducks, and others of that kind swim higher still, but are very strong swimmers and difficult to catch when only winged, diving incessantly, and going out to the middle of the lake or pond, unlike the teal or mallard, who invariably, when winged or otherwise wounded, make for the land, if the sportsman keeps out of sight, and endeavour to hide themselves in the grass at the water's edge. Geese when winged dive with far greater quickness and facility than would be expected, and I have had very great trouble in catching a wild goose on a lake, after I had knocked her down, although I was rowing in a light and easily-managed boat. Careful observation of the different manner of swimming adopted by the several kinds of wild fowl when wounded is of the greatest use to the sportsman, saving him and his retriever many a weary and often useless wetting. Even with the best water-dog it is frequently of no avail to attempt to catch winged ducks of any kind. In cold weather, when the water is rough and the birds get a good start in an open lake, it is not only loss of time but is cruel to urge your dog to follow them too long. I have often succeeded in bagging winged ducks, widgeon, and teal by walking round the edge of the lochs an hour or two after I had shot them, as the birds when left to themselves, the rest of the flock having gone away, either leave the water and hide in the grass or else come close to the edge.

It occasionally happens in a small pool that a winged wild duck goes under and never appears again, having become entangled in the weeds, &c., at the bottom.

Wild fowl seldom live any length of time after they are winged, as they generally fall a prey to foxes and other vermin, all of whom have a habit of hunting round lakes and

swamps during the night, when the wounded birds quit the deep water to feed in the shallows or marshy places.

That beautiful bird the pintail is also a very quick diver and strong swimmer when wounded. It is a good rule in wild fowl shooting always to endeavour to get shots at the birds either when they are on dry land or when it is probable that they will fall upon it. In the first place, no bird is so easy to kill whilst swimming as whilst standing or walking, as then all the body is exposed; and in the second place, so much time is lost, and so much disturbance caused by pursuing the wounded birds, and even by getting the dead ones out of the water. Besides it is almost a matter of certainty that when they are shot over the water some of the killed birds will be lost; and however good a water-dog your retriever may be, and however hardy, the less swimming and wetting he gets the better. Nothing is so ill-judged and useless as sending a dog into the water without good reason for it; doing so is always taking something, more or less, from his strength and injuring his constitution. When standing waiting for ducks in cold weather the poor animal has no means of drying or warming himself, and lies shivering at your feet, and laying up the foundation of rheumatism and other maladies.

A dog who has much water-work to do should always be kept in good condition, and, if possible, even fat. It is a mistake to suppose that allowing him to come into the house and warm himself before the fire makes him less hardy; on the contrary, I consider that getting warm and comfortable before the kitchen fire on coming home gives the retriever a better chance of keeping up his strength, health, and energy when much exposed to cold and wet during the day; a far better chance, indeed, than if, on returning, he is put into a cold kennel, where, however well supplied with straw, hours must elapse before he is thoroughly warm and dry. Most rough dogs stand cold well enough as long as they are tolerably dry, but frequent wetting is certain to cause disease and rheumatism. I am sure, too, with regard to water dogs, that a good covering of fat is a far more efficacious means of keeping them warm than the roughest coat of hair that dog ever wore. In wild animals, such as otters, seals, &c., which are much exposed to wet in cold countries, we always find that their chief defence against the cold consists in a thick coating of fat, and that their hair is short and close. In like manner

dogs who are in good condition can better sustain the intense cold of the water than those whose only defence consists in a shaggy hide. Short-coated dogs are also the most active and powerful swimmers, and get dry sooner than those who are too rough-coated.

The imperviousness to wet of the plumage of wild fowl is evidently not caused by any power which the birds have of supplying grease or oil to their feathers. The feathers have a certain degree of oiliness no doubt, but from frequent observation I am convinced that it is the manner in which the feathers are placed which is the cause of the water running off them as it does.

As long as any kind of wild duck is alive, his skin remains perfectly dry whilst he is in the water, although from the situation in which he may be placed—being pursued, for instance—it is quite impossible for him to find time to “oil his plumage,” as some authors assert he does, “in order to keep out the wet;” but the moment a duck or water fowl is dead the water penetrates through the feathers, wetting the animal completely. If one wing is broken, the feathers of that wing immediately become soaked with wet, the bird not having the power of keeping the feathers of the broken part in the proper position to resist the entry of the water. We all know that birds are able to elevate, depress, and in fact to move their feathers in any direction, by a muscular contraction of the skin. When this power ceases they hang loosely in every direction, and the wet enters to the skin.

The otter’s skin never appears to be wet, however long the animal may remain in the water; but, like the plumage of birds, soon becomes soaked through when the animal is dead. Whilst he is alive the water runs off his hair exactly as it does from the back of a bird during a shower. When we find any bird or animal with its feathers or hair wet and clinging together, it is a sure sign that the poor creature is either diseased or is suffering from some wound or accident.

CHAPTER XXX.

Taming and Education of Wild Animals—The Eagle; his want of docility—Courage and Intelligence of the Noble Falcons—The Hound—Return of Cats to their home—Maternal Instinct of Cats—The Carrier-Pigeon—Wood-Pigeons—Dovecot Pigeons—Sight of Pigeons—Blue-rock Pigeons—Crested Titmouse—The Robin; pugnacious disposition of—Sparrows; impudence of.

ALMOST every wild animal is more or less capable of being

reclaimed, and rendered, if not of actual use to us, at least an object of interest and amusement. In all attempts to educate them, patience and temper on the part of the teacher is the first requisite. If fortunately he be endowed with this important qualification, he will scarcely find any bird or beast so wild or so obstinate "*ut non mitescere possit.*" But some, it must be admitted, scarcely repay the labour bestowed upon them. The eagle can be tamed, but to no great extent. Naturally of a greedy and craving disposition, he is not to be depended upon at all times; and though he may show a certain degree of affection for his keeper, he can seldom be safely approached by strangers.

An eagle, although he may have been trained for a long time and with great care for the purpose of hunting, is just as likely to swoop at and kill his master's dogs, or even to attack a man himself, as to fly at any game. In this he differs from the falcons, that is those of the hawk tribe, who are called "noble falcons," in contradistinction to those termed "ignoble." The Iceland, the Greenland, the peregrine, and the merlin also, are all "noble falcons." The lanner, formerly in high repute for the chase, is now so seldom seen in this country, either alive or dead, that little is known as to his merits; but the other noble hawks whom I have enumerated are all of a most kindly and tractable disposition, and possess that great courage which gives them the full confidence in man which is necessary for their education. These birds have also great aptitude to receive instruction; their habits are social, and before they have been long in confinement they become perfectly contented with their lot. When out in the field, a trained hawk is in no way flurried or alarmed by the movement of men or dogs, but sits looking, when unhooded, with calm confidence on all that is going on around him; and although his fine dark eye evinces neither fear nor disquietude, not the smallest bird can pass without his immediately descrying it, and intently watching it until it is lost in the distance—and great must that distance be which conceals any bird from the falcon's eye. I have often fired my gun off at a bird, with a hooded hawk sitting on one arm, without his evincing the least fear or uneasiness,—as great a proof of his courage as need be required. In fact, a hawk, like a dog, soon learns to look upon her master as her best friend.

When a well-trained hawk has pursued a bird to any dis-

tance out of sight of her master, and misses catching it, she invariably flies straight back to the place where she was first started. I scarcely know a more pleasing sight than to see the falcon returning with direct and rapid flight, searching for her master in the exact spot, although in a strange and new country, where she had last seen him. If, however, she has killed a prey, this quick return does not take place, and the falconer must follow as straight as he can in the line of her flight; by doing so he will seldom fail to find her. A hound, in the same way, after a chase of many hours' duration, if he loses the huntsman, will always return to the spot where he started from.

The instinctive power possessed by so many animals of finding their way back again, either to their accustomed home or to the place from which they had started, appears almost inexplicable, as in many instances it is certain that they cannot be guided by any sense analogous to those which we possess. Well-authenticated instances of dogs and cats, and horses also, finding their way back from great distances to their home, although the mode in which they have been conveyed from it has deprived them of all assistance from their organs of sight, are so frequent as scarcely to excite attention; and yet how wonderful must be the intelligence which guides the animal!

One of the most unquestionable instances of a cat's displaying this faculty which has come under my own immediate observation was that of a kitten about three parts grown, who certainly had never been in the habit of going ten yards from the house-door. Wishing to get rid of her, I sent her in a bag to a person who lived more than two miles from my own residence. Although the cat travelled over a road perfectly unknown to her, and in a bag, which entirely prevented her seeing anything, she was the next morning purring about as usual, and claiming attention in the kitchen, as if she had never left it.

Another curious instance of a cat's travelling capabilities fell under my notice. By some means she discovered the place to which her kitten had been taken, more than a mile off; and every night the poor mother went to suckle her young one, returning, when the process was over, to perform the same service to another kitten left at home. In this instance the cat lived in a large town; through some of the streets of which, as well as a good mile of the outskirts, she

had to take her nightly walk. Many a danger from boy and dog the poor animal must have gone through during her peregrinations; nothing, however, stopped her as long as the kitten required her maternal attention. Notwithstanding these amiable traits in the feline character, I must condemn the cat as an animal who in general repays all the care and kindness of her master with but little strength of affection. Indeed her instincts seem to attach her only to the fireplace or loft in which she has been accustomed to live, and not to the kind hand which feeds her. Some instances of love for their owners I have known; but, in comparison with that shown by dogs, they are rare and slight, although the domestic bringing up of, and kindness shown to, cats are oftener greater, and less mixed with the severe correction often inflicted upon dogs.

The sense which leads the carrier-pigeon hundreds of miles in so short a time, and in so direct a course, is inexplicable. After circling for a few moments, the bird decides unhesitatingly on its exact line of flight, though it may never have seen the country before, and has not the assistance of the example and guidance of any more experienced companions, as is always the case with migrating birds.

The carrier-pigeon is very beautifully shaped, with broad chest and most powerfully jointed wings. Except as to the head and feet, this kind of pigeon has very much the form of a falcon, and is peculiarly well fitted for long-continued and rapid flight.

The woodpigeons in this country are to a certain degree migratory, imitating, *longo intervallo*, the American passenger-pigeons, in shifting their quarters from one part of the kingdom to another, being influenced in their migrations by the abundance or scarcity of food.

The common dove-cot or blue pigeon generally flies several miles, morning and evening, to favourite feeding-places, seldom seeking for food in the immediate neighbourhood of the pigeon-house. In the months of May and June the house-pigeons have most difficulty in procuring food, the crops being all unripe, and none of the seed-corn remaining on the surface of the ground. At this season, too, few weeds have ripened; and the pigeons have therefore to depend in a great measure for their own subsistence and that of their young on the minute seed of the turnip, which is sown at this period. It must require no little labour to enable them

to fill their crops with this small seed. As in this country the turnip fields are for the most part drilled and rolled, the poor birds have the greater difficulty in satisfying the hunger of their young ones; and no young bird requires so much food as an unfledged pigeon, in proportion to its size and weight.

The power of the pigeon to alter the focal length of its eye must be very great, as it is able to see equally well an object at a distance of many miles and a minute seed not more than half an inch from the end of its bill.

The turtle-dove is sometimes, but only rarely, met with as far north as Morayshire, but the stock-dove is never seen in that part of the country: if once introduced, I should imagine that it would thrive perfectly well, as both the climate and the natural productions of the district are suited to it.

The hardy little blue-rock pigeon abounds on all the sea-coast of Scotland, where the rocks are steep and broken into fissures and caverns—one moment dashing into its breeding-place, and rapidly flying out the next; then skimming the very surface of the breakers, this little bird gives animation and interest to many a desolate and rugged range of cliffs as far north as Cape Wrath and Whiten Head. It abounds also in most of the islands. Frequently living where there is little cultivated ground, the blue-rock pigeon feeds on many green plants, and I have also found its crop nearly full of small shells. Whatever its principal food may be, it is a particularly well-flavoured and delicate bird, and much superior in this respect to either the dovescot pigeon or the woodpigeon.

A very beautiful little bird, and one not generally known to breed in Britain, is the crested titmouse. From the number of specimens which have been procured by Mr. Dunbar from the woods of Strathspey it is evident that this bird must be there in great abundance, although it does not appear to extend its visits to other parts of the country, with the exception of the woods about Dulsie on the Findhorn. In these picturesque and beautiful woods the crested titmouse is found, but not in such numbers as in Strathspey. Its habits are the same as those of the other species of tomtits, searching actively among the fir-trees for insects and hanging from the branches in every possible attitude, probing every crevice with its tiny but strong bill. All the kinds of

titmice are very carnivorously inclined, feeding greedily on any dead bird or other animal which they may meet with. Our favourite, the robin, is not much behind them in this respect, having a very great partiality for raw meat and dead animals.

Although so much protected, and in fact enjoying an almost entire immunity from all human persecutors, the robins do not appear to increase in numbers; this is, in all probability, occasioned by the bird generally breeding on the ground, and being thereby exposed to the attacks of weasels, rats, &c. Were it not for this, the almost sacred character the robin has always held amongst bird-nesting schoolboys and juvenile sportsmen must have caused its numbers to increase; but we still see the same dead branch or the same railing head occupied by a single robin year after year; no rivals spring up to dispute the favourite perch.

Of all pugnacious birds the robin is the most determined fighter. When snow and frost cover the ground, and we feed the birds at the windows and on the gravel walks, thrushes, blackbirds, sparrows, and many other birds come to share the crumbs, but none dare eat if any robin is there, until the fiery little fellow permits him. Thrushes and all are beaten and driven away, and even after he has crammed himself to repletion, the robin will sit at the window and drive away with the most furious attacks every bird whose hunger prompts him to try to snatch a morsel of his leavings. Perched amidst the crumbs, he looks the very personification of ill-temper and pugnacity. The thrush, on the contrary, allows every bird to feed with him, and puts on a complaining but not an angry look when an impudent sparrow or tomtit snatches the morsel of bread from his bill.

In large towns it is curious to see how accustomed sparrows become to all the noises and sights by which they are surrounded. You see a flock of sparrows feeding in the middle of a paved street, an omnibus comes rattling along, shaking the very houses, and making din and noise enough to deafen a miller, yet the sparrows merely hop out of reach of the wheels and do not take the trouble to go a yard farther. Knowing either from instinct or long experience that they are safe from gun or trap, where every passer-by is too intent on his own more important matters to waste a thought upon them, they become most impudently confident of their own safety.

Like all other birds, sparrows adapt themselves without difficulty to whatever place they happen to live in. In towns they make their nests in curious holes and corners under the tiles and roofs of the houses, or about the projections and carvings on churches and old buildings. In country villages they delight in holes in thatched roofs or in corn stacks, while in less populous localities they build almost wholly in trees, and even in hedges not many feet from the ground, keeping, however, a watchful and knowing eye to the security of the place they fix upon for their loosely made and conspicuous nest. There seems to be one *sine quâ non* in the choice of their abode, and that is the vicinity of man. Sparrows never wander very far from houses and towns; in fact this bird appears to be more at home on the roof of a house in the midst of a populous city than in any other situation. Basking in the sun on a lofty wall or house-top, a flock of sparrows look down upon the crowded streets with a pert, impudent air, chattering and chirping to each other as if making their remarks on the busy throng below them, and seem as perfectly at their ease in the midst of the noise, bustle, and smoke as the impudent set of schoolboys who look up at them with a longing eye.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Instinct of Birds—The Woodcock carrying her young—Herons—Water-Ousel—Nest of Golden-Eye Duck—Habits of Birds—Talons of Falcons and Hawks—Stuffed Birds—Plumage, &c., of Owls—The Osprey and Sea Swallow—Manner of Fishing—Carriion-feeding Birds—Manner of finding their Food—The Eagle—Sense of Smell in Birds—In Ducks and Geese—Power of communicating with each other—Notes of alarm—A few words respecting destroying Hawks, &c.—Colour of Birds adapted to concealment—Instinct of Birds finding Food—Red Deer—Tame Roe-buck.

MANY people doubt the fact of the woodcock carrying her young, from the wood to the swamp, in her feet, and certainly the claws of a woodcock appear to be little adapted to grasping and carrying a heavy substance, yet such is most undoubtedly the case. Regularly as the evening comes on, many woodcocks carry their young ones down to the soft feeding-grounds, and bring them back again to the shelter of the woods before daylight, where they remain during the whole day. I myself have never happened to see the

woodcocks in the act of returning, but I have often seen them going down to the swamps in the evening, carrying their young with them. Indeed it is quite evident that they must in most instances transport the newly-hatched birds in this manner, as their nests are generally placed in dry heathery woods, where the young would inevitably perish unless the old ones managed to carry them to some more favourable feeding-ground. Both young woodcocks and snipes are peculiarly helpless birds, as, indeed, are all the waders, until their bills have hardened, and they have acquired some strength of wing and leg. Unlike the young of partridges and some other birds who run actively as soon as hatched, and are able to fly well in a very short time, woodcocks, snipes, and waders while young are very helpless, moving about with a most uncertain and tottering gait, and unable to take wing until they are full grown. Their growth is, however, extremely rapid.

Snipes, redshanks, and several other birds of this genus are hatched and brought up on the same kind of ground on which they feed; but woodcocks, in this country at least, are generally hatched far from the marshes, and therefore the old birds must, of necessity, carry their helpless young to these places, or leave them to starve in the dry heather: nor is the food of the woodcock of such a nature that it could be taken to the young from the swamps in any sufficient quantity. Neither could the old birds bring with it the moisture which is necessary for the subsistence of all birds of this kind. In fact they have no means of feeding their young except by carrying them to their food, for they cannot carry their food to them.

The foot of the heron, as well as its general figure, seems but little adapted for perching on trees, and yet whoever visits a herony will see numbers of these birds perched in every kind of attitude, on the very topmost branches of the trees. The water-ousel manages to run on the ground at the bottom of the water, in search of its food. All these actions of birds seem not only difficult, but would almost appear to be impossible. Nevertheless the birds perform them with ease, as well as many others equally curious and apparently equally difficult.

The feet of ducks are peculiarly ill adapted for perching on trees; nevertheless the golden-eye duck generally breeds in hollow trees, not only in broken recesses of the trunk,

easy of access, but even in situations where, after having entered at a narrow round aperture, she has to descend for nearly an arm's length, almost perpendicularly to reach the nest. Through this same entrance also she has to take her young ones when hatched, before they can be launched on their natural element—water.

I could give numberless instances of birds and other animals performing actions and adopting habits which to all appearance must be most difficult and most unsuited to them; all these prove that we are not to judge of nature by any fixed and arbitrary rules, and still less should we attempt to bring all the countless anomalies of animal life into any system of probabilities of our own devising. The more we investigate the capabilities of living animals of every description, the more our powers of belief extend. For my own part indeed, having devoted many happy years to wandering in the woods and fields, at all hours and at all seasons, I have seen so many strange and unaccountable things connected with animal life, that now nothing appears to me too wonderful to be believed.

The feet and claws of different kinds of hawks vary very much, being beautifully adapted to the manner in which each bird strikes its prey. If we examine the claws and feet of the peregrine falcon, the merlin, or any of the other long-winged hawks, including the varieties of these noble birds, all of whom I believe were called in the age of falconry "The Ger Falcon," such as the Iceland, the Greenland, and the Norwegian falcon, we find that their power consists rather in their strength of talon and foot than in the sharp needle-like claws of the hen harrier, the sparrowhawk, the goshawk, &c. The rationale of this difference seems to be that the falcons strike their prey by main force to the ground in the midst of their flight: whilst the other hawks usually pounce on the animals on which they feed, and take them unawares on the ground instead of by fair pursuit and swiftness of wing. The sparrowhawk and hen harrier seldom chase a bird to any distance on the wing.

I have spoken of the peregrine, the Iceland, the Greenland falcon, and also the falcon of Norway as being distinct species. This, however, is a point to be decided by naturalists more skilful in the anatomy and osteology of birds than I am myself. *Scribimus indocti!* My remarks are merely the result of my own unscientific observations, aided by the

inspection of the numerous and beautifully-prepared specimens of my friend Mr. Hancock, who, I believe, I may safely assert is the best stuffer of birds in the kingdom. The examination of his collection has been a source of great pleasure to me, but it has also had the effect of making me dissatisfied with the performances of all other preservers of birds. A bird, when it is stuffed and "set up," as they term it, ought to be "*aut Cæsar aut nihil*." A bird stuffed in a second-rate manner is a very valueless and unsatisfactory affair; and it would be far better, for the furtherance of natural history, if people, instead of having a rare bird badly stuffed and put into a distorted shape and attitude, with projections where no projections should be, and hollows where there should be none, would be content to keep merely the skin just sufficiently filled with cotton or tow to prevent its shrinking.

The owls have all extremely hard and needle-like claws, and in every respect the bird is singularly well adapted for its manner of feeding, which it does almost wholly at night. Its immensely large ears must enable it to hear the slightest movement of the field-mouse, upon which it chiefly feeds; and its sharply-pointed talons contract with a tenacity and closeness unequalled by those of any of the hawk tribe, excepting perhaps the hen-harrier. Again, the soft downy feathers and rounded wings of the owl enable it to flit as noiselessly as a shadow to and fro, as it searches for the quick-eared mouse, whom the least sound would at once startle and drive into its hole, out of reach of its deadly enemy. As it is, the mouse feeds on in heedless security, with eyes and nose busily occupied in searching for grains of corn or seeds, and depending on its quickly sensitive ear to warn it of the approach of any danger. The foot of man, or even the tread of dog or cat, it is sure to hear; but the owl glides quickly and silently round the corner of the hedge or stack (like *Death, tacito clam venit illa pede*), and the first intimation which the mouse has of its danger is being clasped in the talons of its devourer.

The owls of this country are far more serviceable to us than we imagine, destroying countless mice and rats. It must be admitted, however, that both the long-eared owl and the common brown owl will, during the time they have young ones to feed, destroy and carry off pigeons, young game, and other birds with a determined savageness equal to that evinced by any of the hawk tribe.

The rough and strong feet of the osprey are perfectly adapted to the use which they are put to, that is, catching and holding the slippery and strong sea-trout or grilse. The fact of a bird darting down from a height in the air, and securing a fish in deep water, seems almost incredible, especially when we consider the rapidity with which a fish, and particularly a sea-trout, darts away at the slightest shadow of danger, and also when we consider that the bird who catches it is not even able to swim, but must secure its prey by one single dash made from a height of perhaps fifty feet.

The swiftest little creature in the whole sea is the sand-eel; and yet the terns catch thousands of these fish in the same way as the osprey catches the trout; excepting that the tern uses its sharp-pointed bill instead of its feet. I have often taken up the sand-eels which the terns have dropped on being alarmed, and have invariably found that the little fish had but one small wound, immediately behind the head. That a bird should catch such a little slippery, active fish as a sand-eel, in the manner in which a tern catches it, seems almost inconceivable; and yet every dweller on the sea-coast sees it done every hour during the period that these birds frequent our shores. In nature nothing is impossible; and when we are talking of habits and instincts, no such word as impossibility should be used.

I never could quite understand the instinct which leads carrion-feeding birds to their food. We frequently see ravens, buzzards, and other birds of similar habits congregating round the dead body of an animal almost immediately after it has ceased to live; and therefore I cannot agree with those naturalists who assert that it is the sense of smelling which leads these birds to their feast. From my own observation I am convinced that this is not the case, as I have known half a dozen buzzards collect round a dead cat, on the afternoon of the same day on which it had been killed, and this, too, during the winter season, when the dead animal could have emitted no odour strong enough to attract its devourers. I am far more inclined to attribute their facility in finding out their food to a quick sense of sight. For the sake of catching these birds and the grey crows also, I was accustomed to have the dead vermin thrown into a field near the house where traps were placed round them. When the cats were skinned, and therefore were the more

conspicuous, the carrion birds usually found them out in the same afternoon. Now buzzards, ravens, and other birds who feed on dead bodies are in the habit of frequently soaring for hours together, at an immense height in the air, wheeling round and round in wide circles. I have no doubt at these times they are searching with their keen and far-seeing eye for carcases and other substances fit for food. The eagle, who also feeds on dead bodies, wheels and circles in a similar manner, at such a height in the air that he frequently looks like a mere speck in the sky. There can be no doubt that it is upon his eye only that he depends. When, even at this vast height, his quick eye catches sight of a grouse in the heather, down drops the bird of prey as if shot, till within some thirty yards of the ground, when suddenly stopping his downward course, he again hovers stationary over the grouse, till a fair opportunity offers itself for a swoop. I have frequently seen the eagle do this; and he has sometimes discovered the grouse from a height and distance so great as to make it appear impossible that he should have distinguished so small an object.

It is certain, however, that birds have a tolerably acute sense of smelling, although I know that it has been positively denied that ducks are guided by their scenting powers in taking alarm, and that it is by their quick sense of hearing *only* that they are warned of the approach of danger. But this I utterly deny; for I have constantly seen wild fowl, when I have been sitting perfectly motionless in an ambuscade, swim quietly towards me without the slightest warning of my vicinity, till coming to that point where my place of concealment was directly to windward of them, they immediately caught the scent, took wing, and flew in as great alarm as if I had stood up in full view. The same thing has occurred very frequently when I have been in pursuit of geese; the birds invariably taking alarm as soon as they came in a line with me and the wind, and just as much so when I was motionless and not making the slightest noise, as when I was creeping towards them. The same sense of smelling doubtless guides birds, in many cases, to their food, but it is certainly not the sole or even the principal guide of the ravens or the eagles.

When one of the carrion-birds has found a booty, others of the same species who may be wheeling about at a greater distance at once see by his manner of flight and other signs

that he has made some discovery, and immediately follow in the same direction, in order that they may come in for their share.

In like manner, when one wild duck has found out a quantity of corn, laid down in any particular place, he soon brings others to the spot, and these again give information to others, until at length large flocks collect to feed on what was originally discovered by a single bird. I do not mean to infer that they can communicate to each other by any bird-language the existence and locality of the prize found; but they all go to the spot attracted by the manner of flight of the first discoverers, which doubtless tells their companions most plainly that they are winging their way directly towards a depôt of food, and not going forth on a vague and uncertain search.

The clamour and noise of crows when they find a prize tell the tale at once to all within hearing, and not to those of their own kind only but to all ravens or rooks in the neighbourhood.

In the same manner birds communicate alarm and warning, not only to those of their own species, but also to others. Often has the cry of a crow, who has suddenly while passing over my head discovered my hiding-place, caused a flock of geese or other wild fowl to take wing instantaneously, as if they themselves had seen me; and many a shot have I lost by the cries of peewits and other birds.

I have often been led to think that, when different kinds of wild-fowl were feeding in a quiet place, the mallards and widgeon have taken no heed to their own security as long as there were either curlews or redshanks feeding near them; being apparently quite satisfied that these vigilant and noisy birds were sufficiently watchful sentinels to warn them on the first approach of danger.

A stag takes warning from the alarm-note of the grouse or plover as quickly as if he had himself seen an enemy, and from the manner of the bird's flight he knows pretty accurately where the danger lies.

In getting up to deer it has more than once happened that I have had either to lie motionless for a long time, or to make a considerable circuit, in order to avoid putting up a cock-grouse, who, eyeing my serpentine movements with suspicion, has been ready to rise with his loud cry of alarm had I approached a yard nearer to him. In fact there is a language

of signs and observation carried on between animals of different kinds, which is as perfectly understood by them as if they could communicate by words.

It is difficult to determine how far we are right in endeavouring utterly to destroy one kind of animal or bird in order to increase another species. Nature, if left to herself, keeps up a fair equilibrium and proportion amongst all her productions; and, without doubt, if the world were left to itself without the interference of mankind, there would never be an undue proportion of any one kind of living creature: the birds of prey would keep down the granivorous birds from increasing till they devoured all the fruits of the earth; and the carnivorous birds and beasts would never entirely extirpate any other species, as their own numbers would be lessened by want of food before this could happen; besides which, we see that unless artificial means are resorted to, the number of living animals always bears proportion to, and is regulated by the supply of food which offers itself; and, as these supplies fail, there is a natural tendency for the consumers to cease increasing, or to betake themselves to other regions. But when man comes in as an active agent, he gradually extirpates all beasts and birds of prey for the purpose of protecting and causing to increase the weaker but more useful animals and birds. In this country, for instance, we can no more afford to allow hawks and crows, foxes and weasels, to flourish and increase, however picturesque and beautiful they may be, than we could afford to allow poppies or other useless but ornamental wild flowers to overrun our corn fields.

A pair of peregrine falcons take possession of a rock—they will issue out as regularly as the morning appears to search for grouse, partridges, or other birds, which form the food of man. It is the same with other hawks; and we well know that crows destroy more game than all the shooters in the kingdom. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to keep down the numbers of these marauders as much as possible.

I cannot say that I am at all anxious to see our island entirely clear of what all game-preservers call "vermin." There is more beauty and more to interest one in the flight and habits of a pair of falcons than in a whole pack of grouse; and I regret constantly to see how rare these birds, and eagles, and many others, are daily becoming, under the influence of traps, poison, and guns. The edict which has gone

forth against them is far too comprehensive and sweeping, and many perfectly innocent birds go to swell the game-keeper's list of "vermin." But I have gone fully into this subject before.

One advantage certainly results from birds of prey being killed off: blackbirds, thrushes, and numerous other beautiful little birds, increase in proportion as their enemies are destroyed. In several districts where a few years ago these birds were very rare they are now abundant.

The ring-ousel, too, is one of the birds who has benefited by this destruction of its enemies. There are some other birds, such as the wheat-ear and tit-lark, who are seldom killed by a hawk, but whose nests and young are the constant prey of weasels and other ground-vermin. These also have good reason to thank the trapper. Wood-pigeons, whose eggs were formerly taken by the crows and magpies in great numbers, and whose young served to feed many kinds of hawks, now increase daily, and begin to be a subject of great complaint amongst farmers; and yet the wood-pigeon during a great part of the year feeds on the seeds of many weeds and plants which are useless to mankind. The eggs of birds are in general more or less concealed from their enemies, either by the nest being similar in colour to the surrounding substances, or by its situation; but the eggs of the wood-pigeon are particularly exposed to the attacks of crows, magpies, &c. Their young, too, are constantly stolen out of the nest by hawks and owls. It is a singular circumstance connected with the "*table arrangements*" of these birds of prey, that they never carry off the young wood-pigeons till they are nearly fledged and ready to fly.

The ptarmigan's chance of escape from birds of prey is much better: they are exactly the colour of the stones in summer, and of the snow in winter, and change their colour as that of their abiding place is altered. The grouse is as nearly the colour of the brown heather as it is possible for a bird to be; his bright eye and red comb are the only discoverable points about him when he is crouched in it. The black-cock's usual haunt is in lower situations, and he delights in the peat-moss, where the ground is nearly as black as his own plumage. The partridge and quail are exactly similar in colour to the dried grass or stubble, and the quickest eye can seldom see them on the ground when crouched, and not erect or moving about to feed. The pheasant's colour very

nearly resembles the dead leaves of the wood and coppice, which are his favourite haunts.

The owl sits securely close to the trunk of a forest-tree, her mottled-brown plumage being in colour exactly like the bark of the trunk close to which she is perched. The peregrine-falcon, with her blue-grey feathers, can scarcely be distinguished from the lichen-covered crag, where she sits for hours together as motionless as the rock itself. The eagle sits upright on some cliff of the same colour as himself, huddled up into a shape which only the experienced eye detects to be that of a bird. The attitudes and figures of the whole tribe of hawks are very striking and characteristic, and as unlike as possible to the stuffed caricatures which one usually meets with, and in which the natural character of the bird is entirely lost. From want of time, and still more from not having frequent opportunities of studying living subjects, bird-stuffers in general make less advancement towards excellence in their avocation than almost any other class of artists, nor has the present leaning towards ornithological pursuits produced much improvement amongst them.

In addition to the protection which similarity of colour affords to animals, they have a natural instinct which leads them to choose such places of concealment as, from the nature of the surrounding objects, are the best fitted to conceal them. The hare, for instance, constantly makes her form amongst grey stones much of her own size and colour; and birds which are much persecuted do the same. The larger size of red-deer obliges them to depend rather on the inaccessibility of their resting-places than on any attempt at concealment; and the roebuck's safety is in the denseness and roughness of the wood in which it lies.

There is some powerful instinct, also, which assist animal in finding their food; and many go direct from great distances to places where they are sure of finding it. Pigeons find out newly-sown peas and other favourite grains almost immediately after they have been put into the ground; and will frequently fly several miles to a field the very first morning after it is sown. Wild ducks, also, whose researches can only be made by night, are equally quick in finding places where there is plenty of any favourite food. The small gulls, particularly the black-headed gull, discover the ploughman before he has finished his first furrow, and collect in great flocks to pick up every grub or worm which he turns up.

The rapid instinct of birds who feed on carrion has been alluded to already. In fact all birds, whatever their food may be, have an instinctive power of discovering it immediately, and that from such great distances as to baffle all attempt at explanation. In the mountainous districts of Sutherlandshire and others of the northern counties, the red-deer invariably knows the exact time when the shepherd's patch of corn and potatoes is fit for his food, and will sometimes come down in such numbers as to eat up and destroy the entire crop in a single night; or if the cultivated ground be extensive, they will repeat their visit in spite of all attempts to drive them away; and the cleverness they display in taking advantage of every unguarded moment is quite astonishing. In Sutherlandshire little loss accrues to the tenant from this, as a fair allowance for such damage is always readily granted. It is a curious sight to see these animals depending entirely on their own resources and cunning in avoiding danger, and, in spite of their natural timidity, coming fearlessly down to the very door of a cottage to feed on their favourite food, and frequently from very considerable distances; and even after the oats are cut and piled up in sheaves, I have seen red-deer with astonishing boldness manage to appropriate to themselves no inconsiderable share of the ripe corn.

All the deer tribe soon find out when danger ceases. In a domesticated state no animal becomes more fearless and bold than a stag; and in proportion as they become so, they are dangerous to strangers, whom they attack with great fierceness. They have, however, discrimination enough to assault women more frequently than men, being evidently aware that they are the more helpless of the two, and less able to resist. Even a roebuck, when tamed, will do this; and their activity and strength render them no contemptible antagonists.

I remember a roebuck, belonging to a clergyman of the Established Church of Scotland, which one day attacked and hurt a woman who was a zealous supporter of the Free Church. The good lady uttered the most bitter maledictions against the clerical owner of the roe, vowing that he kept his Satanic majesty "in the shape of a horned beast," for the sole purpose of attacking and destroying Free Church people.

A roe, though so beautiful an animal, is a most unsatisfactory pet; as they invariably either become dangerous as

they become tame, or else take to the woods and are killed, their instinctive knowledge of danger having apparently deserted them.

SCOTCH STREAMS AND LAKES.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Rivers, Streams and Lakes in Scotland—The Tweed—The Lakes and Streams of Argyleshire—Loch Awe—A contest with a *Salmo ferox*—Inverness-shire, Ross-shire, and Sutherland—Pike not an *injurious* destroyer of Trout—Char—The River Shin—Pertinacity of Salmon in ascending Streams—The Beaully—The Findhorn—The Spey—The Dee—Decrease in the number of Salmon ; its causes and its cure—Extent of the trade of Fly-making.

MANY and varied are the streams and lakes of Scotland, and scarcely any two of them contain trout of exactly similar appearance. Although of the same species, and alike in all the essential parts of anatomy, &c., in outward appearance, shape, and colour, trout vary more than any other fish. As I have before observed, these fish have the power of either voluntarily or involuntarily taking, to a remarkable degree, the colour of the water in which they live. In the same way do they derive their brown and yellow hue from the stones on which they are accustomed to lie. Few Highland streams contain very large trout: the feeding is not abundant enough, the cold waters not being sufficiently productive of animalcula and small insects. Fish are as dependent on the nature of the soil through which a stream runs, as oxen are on the richness of the meadows on which they pasture. The reason is obvious: a river which runs through a fertile country always abounds in flies, worms, snails, &c., on which its inhabitants feed; while a mountain stream, which flows rapidly through a barren and rocky country, has not the same supply.

I will not pretend to give a descriptive list of all the rivers, streams, and lakes of Scotland, where the angler may find employment for rod and line: they are too numerous for me to do so; nor is my knowledge of them sufficiently complete.

There are few districts, from Ayrshire to Caithness, where trout and salmon are not to be found in tolerable abundance.

Many streams run into the Solway Firth which are plentifully supplied with good trout, fed on the insect population of the fertile fields of Ayrshire, Kirkcudbright, &c. Many fine lakes, abounding in trout, char, and pike, are also to be found in that district. But mines, and other similar works, are already beginning to fill that part of the country with a population peculiarly destructive to fish and game.

The Tweed and its tributaries are known to all as the angler's classic ground, and have been so often described by abler pens than mine, that I will say nothing about them.

Loch Leven trout are famous throughout Scotland.

Then comes the lakes and streams of Argyleshire, beautifully situated in a wild and rugged country, but overrun of late years by cockney and summer tourists. Loch Awe will, however, always maintain its high repute for its large lake trout, which rival the pike in size and voracity, but are stronger, and far more wary and difficult to catch. A "*Salmo ferox*" of fifteen or twenty pounds weight is no mean adversary. His first rush, when he finds himself firmly hooked, is nearly strong enough to tow the fishing coble after him. And then comes the tug of war. The monster, held only by a slight line and tapering rod, is one moment deep down boring his head to the bottom of the lake, with every yard of the line run out, and the rod bent into the water; the next he takes a new freak, and goes off near the surface like a steamboat, and before you can wind in, he is right under your boat and close to the bottom of it, your line being you know not where. Again the reel is whirring round so rapidly, that you feel your line must break in spite of all your fancied skill. But no—he stops suddenly, and again seems inclined to wind your line round and round the boat; or, by Jove! to upset you, if he can, by running against its keel. If there is a projecting nail, or a notch in the wood, he manages to get the line fixed in it. After you have cleared your tackle from this danger, off he darts again. Your Highland boatman swears in Gaelic; you perhaps follow his example in English—at least, to a certainty you blame him for rowing too fast or too slow, and begin to think that you would give a guinea to be honourably rid of the fish, without discredit to your skill as an angler. At last your enemy appears exhausted—you have been long exhausted yourself—and floats quietly near the surface. But at the critical moment of placing the gaff in a position to secure him, he

flaps his tail, and darts off again as strong as ever, taking good care to go right under the boat again. At last, however, patience and good tackle and skill begin to tell; and, after two or three more feeble efforts to escape, your noble-looking fellow of a trout is safely lodged in the bottom of the landing-net.

Inverness-shire and the west of Ross-shire and Sutherland are intersected by numerous excellent salmon rivers and beautiful lakes, full to overflowing of trout and pike. It is a fallacy to suppose that pike are at all detrimental to the sport of the fly-fisher—at least, in a Highland lake, where there is depth and space enough for both trout and pike to live and flourish in. Of course, pike kill thousands and tens of thousands of small trout. But the principal thing to be regretted in almost all Highland lakes is that there are far too many trout in them, and that the fly-fisher may work for a month without killing a trout of two pounds weight. Pike keep down this overstock, and yet still leave plenty of trout, which are of a better size and quality than where they are not thinned. I have invariably found that this is the case, and that I could kill a greater *weight* of trout in a loch where there are pike, than where they had not these their natural enemies to keep down the undue increase in their numbers. Pike, too, are by no means exclusively piscivorous; they are as omnivorous as a pig or an alderman. A great part of the food of a pike consists of frogs, leeches, weeds, &c., &c. Young wild ducks, water-hens, coots, and even young rats, do not come amiss to him. Like a shark, when hungry, the pike swallows anything and everything which comes within reach of his murderous jaws.

If the fact could be ascertained, I would back a “*Salmo ferox*” of ten pounds weight to kill more trout in a week than a pike of the same size would do in a month. I never killed a tolerably large trout without finding within him the remains of other trout, sometimes, too, of a size that must have cost him some trouble to swallow. In fact, I am strongly of opinion that pike deserve encouragement in all large Highland lakes where the trout are numerous and small. There is also no doubt that trout follow up the *lex talionis*, and feed on the young pike as freely as pike feed on young trout.

There are numberless fine lakes in the interior of the northern counties, situated in wild and sequestered spots

remote from roads and tracks, the waters of which are seldom or never troubled by the line of the angler. During my search for the breeding places of the osprey and other rare birds in the north of Sutherland, I have come upon lakes situated in those rugged wildernesses, and frequently high upon the mountains, where I am confident no human being ever practised the "gentle craft." The only enemies that the trout have in these lonely lochs are the otters who live on their banks, or the osprey who builds her nest on some rocky islet, safely encircled by the cold depths of the surrounding waters.

There is also in many of these lakes plenty of char, a fish of mysterious habits, never or seldom taking the fly or any other bait, but at a certain season (about the middle of October, as far as my experience goes) migrating in great shoals from the deepest recesses of the lake, where they spend the rest of the year, to the shallows near the shore. During this short migration they are caught in nets, and frequently in great numbers.

On the east of Sutherlandshire there are several excellent salmon rivers: amongst the best, if not quite the best, of these is the "Shin," which flows out of an extensive lake of the same name, which is full of most excellent trout. In some parts of this county the propensity of salmon to ascend streams is most strikingly exemplified: nothing can exceed the determination with which they work their way from river to lake, from lake to burn, and so gradually ascending every running stream until at last they reach rivulets so small and shallow that you wonder how two salmon can pass each other in them. Taking advantage of every flood which swells the burns, they work themselves up shallows and narrow places where apparently there is scarcely sufficient water for the smallest trout to swim. When they have fulfilled their spawning duties they drop back during the winter floods to the larger streams and thence to the sea, where they become reinvigorated and increase in size with a rapidity which would be incredible had it not been fully ascertained by frequent and specific experiment.

On the east coast of Ross-shire, between Sutherland and Inverness-shire, there are few streams of any size or value.

The Beaully is a noble stream as well for the angler as for the lover of natural beauty, being surrounded with most magnificent scenery.

But above all rivers, "*ante omnes*," the Findhorn holds with me the highest place, not only for the abundance of its fish, but for the varied country and beautiful scenery through which it passes, from the dreary brown and grey heights of the Monaghleahd mountains, at its source, to the flat and fertile plains of Morayshire, where it empties itself into the salt waters ; and, beyond a doubt, the beauty of the scenery and banks of the Findhorn, for several miles, is not to be equalled in Scotland. Most interesting, too, and varied are the wild animals and birds which frequent its rocks and banks, from the stag and eagle, which add to the wild grandeur of its source, to the wild swan and grey goose, which feed at its junction with the bay.

I do not know that the Findhorn can be called a first-rate angling river ; for, although frequently almost full of fish, it is so subject to floods and sudden changes that the fish in it do not generally rise well, being constantly kept on the move.

Although these violent and often most unexpected risings of the river add much to its interest in the eyes of the artist or spectator, they militate sadly against the success of the angler, who has frequently to gather up his tackle as he best can, and run for his life ; or, after having made up his mind to a week's good fishing, finds the river either of a deep black colour, or of the hue and almost of the consistence of pea-soup, overflowing bank and brae, owing to some sudden rain-storm in the distant mountains of the Monaghleahd.

The Spey is another glorious river—a finer river for salmon than even the Findhorn : indeed the rent paid for the salmon-fishing at the mouth of this river proves it to be the best supplied water in Scotland. Everything in this matter-of-fact age brings its real and marketable value ; and, from the amount of rent paid, the number of fish which inhabit each river may be very nearly ascertained by a simple arithmetical process, as all fishing-rents are proportioned correctly and carefully to the number and value of salmon which can be caught. The Spey is a fine wide stream, with a great volume of water ; and although, like all Highland rivers, subject to floods, is not liable to such sudden and dangerous risings as its neighbour, the Findhorn.

The Dee, and many other rivers and streams, all gladdening to the eye of the fly-fisher, pour their waters into the German Ocean : with none of these, however, have I a sufficient

personal acquaintance to enable me to describe their merits or demerits.

It is a matter quite beyond doubt that salmon are decreasing every year in most of the Scottish rivers. With short-sighted cupidity, these valuable fish are hunted down, trapped, and caught in every possible manner; and in consequence of this reckless destruction the proprietors of some salmon rivers will, before many years have elapsed, lose the high rents which they now obtain from sportsmen and speculators. Prolific as they are, fish, like all other animals, must of necessity decrease, unless allowed fair play and time to breed.

It is not the angler who injuriously thins their number. The salmon is too capricious in rising at the fly to make this possible. Nor, indeed, do I think that any extent of fair river-fishing can exterminate them. It is the system of stake-net and bag-net fishing which requires to be better regulated and placed under more stringent local laws. As the fishing is now carried on, the salmon are almost precluded from reaching their breeding-grounds. The mouth of every river is flanked and hemmed in by stake-nets and similar obstructions, against which the poor salmon have not the least chance. Coasting along the shore in search of fresh water, they find a fence which they cannot get through, and which leads them directly into an ingenious but most iniquitous puzzle of a trap. In fact, if the object of proprietors and renters of rivers was to exterminate salmon, they could not devise better means to do so than those now practised. On the other hand, the rents are so high—and they still go on increasing—that the lessees are obliged of necessity to use every means in their power to pay all their heavy expenses to obtain even a moderate profit.

The individual who hires a salmon river as a matter of trade and speculation cannot be expected to be influenced by any other motive than wishing to make the best of his bargain. His outgoings are great; he pays a large rent for the privilege of dragging a net through the water; he pays a rent for the right of putting up stake-nets, bag-nets, cruives, &c., all of which are exposed to injury and destruction by flood and storm; he pays numerous servants and watchers, and has also the great expense of making and renewing his boats, nets, and other valuable tackles—and yet he is the person usually blamed as the destroyer of the salmon,

whereas, in fact, he is actually compelled, in self-defence, to take every fish he can catch, in every possible manner, as the only chance he has of meeting all these heavy expenses. At the same time it must be remembered that no one single proprietor can do anything towards putting down this ruinous system, unless the neighbouring owners on the same line of coast co-operate with him. A pause for a few years in this wholesale destruction would bring the salmon back to something like their former numbers, and enable proprietors of rivers to ask and obtain the same rents as they now do, from English and other sportsmen who come northwards for angling. At present, fly-fishing, in many rivers which were formerly abundantly supplied, is not worth the trouble—a mere *umbra nominis*—excepting during the run of grilse; and this can only be remedied by a system of unanimous and general preservation of the fish.

There is no necessity for restricting the sport of the fly-fisher. Salmon will never be injured to any great extent by this mode of taking them; and were the net-fishing better regulated, and diminished, higher rents would not be grudged by the sportsman.

Excepting amongst anglers, the extent of the trade of fly-making is little known. The number of hands employed, men, women, and even children, whose small fingers are the best adapted for imitating the delicate wings of the midge or ant, and the variety of materials used, would astonish the uninitiated. If any person will examine the wings and body of a single Irish salmon-fly, he will perceive how many substances are used, and how many birds from every quarter of the globe are laid under contribution, to form this tiny but powerfully attractive bait, which, were it less carefully and skilfully constructed, would never entice the wary salmon out of his resting-place, under some stone or rock, where, like a gourmand in the snug corner of his club-room, he patiently but anxiously awaits the arrival of some delicate morsel.

DOGS.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Learned Dog and Show-woman—Education of Sporting Dog—Hereditary Instinct of Dogs—Their thievish propensities descend to their offspring—Bad-tempered dogs—Breaking of Dogs—Their jealousies—Their Hunting alliances—Attachment of a Dog to his Master—Dog-eating reprobated—Bloodhounds—Skye Terriers—Dogs combining against a common enemy—Old Dogs—Singular instance of sagacity in one.

ALTHOUGH I am perfectly content with witnessing the sagacity and instinct displayed by my own dogs in their every-day employments and proceedings, and am, generally speaking, unwilling to countenance the trickery of what are called "learned dogs," yet the other day, to please my children, I allowed a woman, who sent up a most dirty-faced card, announcing herself the possessor of "THE MOST ASTONISHING LEARNED DOG EVER KNOWN," to exhibit the animal in our front hall.

The woman herself was a small, sharp-looking personage, with the sodden and hard expression of feature peculiar to that class who travel in caravans, and exhibit dwarfs, giants, and such-like vamped-up wonders. The dog was a well-fed, comfortable-looking kind of bull-terrier, slightly rough about the muzzle; but notwithstanding his quiet and sedate look, there was a certain expression of low cunning and blackguardism about his face which would have stamped him anywhere as the associate of vile and dissolute company; and although he wagged his stumpy tail, and pretended to look amiable at his equally cunning-looking mistress, his attempts at amiability seemed to be rather the effects of kicks and blows than of genuine attachment. He received her caresses, too, with a kind of uncertain appearance of pleasure, as if he did not much value them, but of the two rather preferred them to her kicks.

On entering the hall he cast a kind of hasty look round him, much as you would expect a rogue to do on entering a shop from which he intended to purloin something; however, on the woman producing certain dirty cards, with their corners all worn round by constant use, and marked with numbers, letters, &c., the dog prepared himself for action,

with a preparatory lick at his lips and a suspicious look at his mistress. The tricks consisted of the usual routine of adding up figures, spelling short words, and finding the first letter of any town named by one of the company. This last trick was very cleverly done, and puzzled us very much, as we—*i.e.* the grown-up part of his audience—were most intently watching, not him, but his mistress, in order to discover what signs she made to guide him in his choice of the cards; but we could not perceive that she moved hand or foot, or made any signal whatever. Indeed, the dog seemed to pay little regard to her, but to receive his orders direct from anyone who gave them. In fact, his teaching must have been perfect, and his intellect wonderful.

Now, I dare say I shall be laughed at for introducing an anecdote of a *learned* dog, and told that it was "all trick." No doubt it was "all trick;" but it was a *very* clever one, and showed how capable of education dogs are—far more so than we imagine. For here was a dog performing tricks so cleverly, that not one out of four or five persons who were most attentively watching him could find out how he was assisted by his mistress. The dog, too, as the woman said, was by no means of the kind easiest to teach. She told us that a poodle or spaniel would be far quicker in learning than a terrier: but I strongly suspect that neither of these kinds would have courage sufficient to stand the corrections necessary to complete their education, without becoming too shy to perform their part well.

The woman, though clever enough in her way and well-spoken, was a melancholy specimen of a peculiar class. Sold by her parents, if she ever had any decided relatives of that kind, at an early age to the leader of some itinerant party of rope dancers, or walkers on stilts—when she had mastered these respectable sciences, she acted in the capacity of rope-dancer, or fifth-rate figurante, in some fifth-rate theatre. Disabled by an accident—a broken ankle—from following these employments, she was reduced at last to travelling to country fairs and markets in a painted caravan, the ill-used companion of some whiskered ruffian, arrayed in a fur cap, red plush waistcoat, corduroy breeches, white stockings and aukle boots—the invariable dress of all masters of show-caravans. And now the poor woman, ruined in health and mind by hardship and dissipation, earns a precarious living by wandering through the country, and exhibiting her learned

dogs, and her unlearned children, who, by dint of beating and starving, had been initiated into the mysteries of their respective callings. She assured me with great professional energy, that one of my dogs, a large poodle, would make a first-rate pupil, and I saw her more than once looking at him with a longing eye.

Dogs, indeed, will almost learn anything; but in teaching sporting dogs, much attention should be paid to the qualities and education of their forefathers. I am no advocate at all for crossing pointers with foxhounds, &c., to increase the strength and endurance of the animal; all dogs so bred will invariably give great trouble in their education from an hereditary inclination to act the hound instead of the pointer. There is quite variety enough in the present breed of pointers to improve your kennel, if you want any addition of bone, speed or courage.

I have seen a young pointer, who was only just able to run out alone, point, and indeed back, as steadily, and with as much certainty as an old dog; but this undoubtedly would not be the case had there been any cross whatsoever in his breeding. The late Mr. Andrew Knight, than whom a more practical and acute naturalist did not exist, paid much attention to what he termed "*the hereditary instinct*" of dogs. His woodcock spaniels were chosen from puppies whose ancestors had been most famous for woodcock hunting; and his rabbit dogs from those whose parents had shown most skill in rabbit hunting. Some years ago I spent many a pleasant half-hour in listening to his amusing and enthusiastic descriptions of the "*hereditary instincts*" of his favourite dogs.

There is certainly no class of dog in which this faculty is more decidedly shown than in retrievers. Although a retriever is frequently of a cross-breed, yet if his ancestors for one or two generations back have been well educated, and have had much practice in retrieving, he invariably requires little if any teaching, and appears to understand the whole of his business instinctively. I am convinced that I have seen this inherited skill exemplified in one of my retrievers, a curious kind of rough animal, who resembles a Russian poodle more than any other dog. I bought him of a man who lived by poaching, and other similar arts, when the dog was six months old, and before he could have acquired any very bad habits. The dog invariably showed, and still shows, the

most determined propensity to steal meat and other eatables. Neither flogging nor good feeding prevents him, and he carries on his operations in so cunning and so systematic a manner, that I dread taking him to any friend's house without instantly fastening him up. As long as any person is looking at him, he remains in a state of apparently the most innocent quietude; but the moment no eye is on him, *abiit evasit*; and to a certainty some joint of meat has vanished with him, but whither, or how, no one knows.

Sometimes he manages not even to be suspected. On one occasion five pounds of beefsteak suddenly disappears. Every dog about the place is suspected except Gripp, and he, "poor brute!" the cook affirms, "cannot be the thief; for he never moved from the fire, where he was drying himself, and he is the quietest dog in the world:" so says my friend's cook, at the very time that the poor good dog is suffering the most painful indigestion from having swallowed so much raw meat in addition to his regular meals, and the extra scraps that he has inveigled out of the cook by his unsophisticated innocence. The next day half a haunch of roebuck is gone: but Gripp still keeps his place in the good graces of everybody. "It couldn't be Gripp," is the universal cry; "he wouldn't do such a thing!" At last Mr. Gripp is caught in the very act of swallowing the remains of a pound of butter, strnggling in vain to bolt it at once; but the slippery lump will not go down. Then comes a long train of circumstantial evidence, and a dozen recent robberies are brought home to him.

Now the beast was already well fed, and was only impelled to steal by an hereditary irresistible impulse, handed down to him from his grandfather and father, who both belonged to a race of poachers in a country town, and had been taught to find their own living. Beyond a question, Gripp inherited his system of morality from his respectable ancestors, to whom also he bore the strongest personal resemblance.

By the same rule, never keep the puppies of a notorious sheep-killing dog, nor of a bad-tempered dog: they are sure to have the same inclinations and tempers as their parents; and you will find it most difficult, if not impossible, to cure them of these faults. The breeders and teachers of dogs would much facilitate their own labours did they pay more attention to the dispositions and habits of the parents of the puppies whom they take in hand.

Dogs have as different dispositions and tempers as their masters. For my own part, I would never take the trouble to bring up and educate puppies who showed either a sulky or a very timid disposition. Neither of these faults can be so completely got rid of as to make them satisfactory assistants or companions. I say *companions*, for I have so much regard for these animals, that I like them as companions, and care little for dogs who have only been taught to obey and hunt for the gamekeeper. I am very far from intending to disparage a kennel of well-broken pointers or setters, and I delight to see them do their work correctly, and with all their beautiful display of instinct, although under the command of the gamekeeper only, and scarcely knowing their own master's voice or whistle. Three or four brace of perfectly-broken dogs pointing and backing without fault is a sight that must interest and amuse every person, whether sportsman or not: yet I far prefer hunting my own brace of dogs, and seeing them look to myself wholly for direction and approbation instead of to my servant. Every dog, with an average share of good sense and good temper, is so eager for his master's approbation, that he will exert himself to the utmost to obtain it; and if this fact were constantly kept in mind, the breaker-in of dogs need seldom have recourse to flogging. Indeed, I have no hesitation in saying that five dogs out of six may be completely broken in without a blow, and that, generally speaking, *quiet, patient* reasoning with a dog is all that is requisite to secure his obedience and attention. I know this is quite contrary to the opinion of most dog-breakers, who think that nothing can be done without a heavy whip and loud rating. But one thing at least is certain, that when you *do* flog a dog, you should do it soundly, and only when you catch him "red hand"—*flagrante delicto*. He cannot then mistake *why* you flog him. Intelligent as this animal is, still it cannot be expected that he should know why he is flogged, if any time has elapsed since the fault was committed.

Dogs have, also, a great deal of jealousy in their disposition; and even *this* may be made to assist in their education, as it makes them strive to outdo each other. Every clever dog is especially unwilling that any of his companions should possess a greater share of his master's favour than himself. One of my dogs could not be induced to hunt in company with another, of whose advances in my good graces he was

peculiarly jealous. There was no other ground of quarrel between them. When Rover saw that a certain young dog was to accompany me, he invariably refused to go out; and, although at other times one of the most eager dogs for sport that I ever possessed, nothing would induce him to go out with his young rival. He also showed his jealousy by flying at him and biting him on every possible occasion where he could do so unobserved. At last, however, when the young dog had grown older, and discovered that his own strength was superior to that of his tyrant, he flew upon poor Rover, and amply revenged all the ill-treatment which he had received at his hands. From that day he was constantly on the look-out to renew his attacks; but having soon established his superiority, he thenceforth contented himself with striking down the old dog, and after standing over him for a minute or two, with teeth bared ready for action, he suffered him to sneak quietly away, for Rover was too old a soldier to resist when he found himself overmatched. At last the poor old fellow got so bullied by this dog, and by two or three others whom I am afraid he had tyrannized over when they were puppies, that he never left the front-door steps, or went round the corner of the house, before he had well reconnoitered the ground, and was sure that none of his enemies were near him; and yet, in his battles with vermin or with strange dogs, he was one of the most courageous animals I ever had.

Although dogs form such strong attachments to man, they seldom appear to feel any great degree of friendship for each other. Occasionally, however, a couple of dogs will enter into a kind of compact to assist each other in hunting. For instance, I have known an old terrier who formed an alliance of this sort with a greyhound, and they used constantly to go out poaching together. The terrier would hunt the bushes, whilst the greyhound stationed herself quietly outside, ready to spring on any rabbit or hare that was started; and she always took the side of the bush opposite to that by which the terrier had entered it. On losing his companion, the terrier, who was becoming old in years and cunning, entered into confederacy with a younger terrier. In all their hunting excursions the old dog laid himself quietly down at some likely-looking meuse or run, and, sending his younger companion to hunt the bushes, he waited patiently and silently for any rabbit that might come in his way. Their

proceedings showed a degree of instinct which almost amounted to reason.

So many stories have been told of the strong attachment of dogs to their masters, that to enlarge upon the subject would be superfluous. I must, however, relate one anecdote which was told me lately. A minister of a parish in this neighbourhood having died, his favourite dog followed his body to the grave, and no inducement could persuade the faithful animal to leave the place. Night and day, bad weather and good, did the dog remain stretched on the grave. The people of the neighbourhood, finding all their endeavours to entice him away fruitless, and respecting his fidelity, fed and protected him. This continued for several weeks—indeed until some time after the manse was tenanted by a new minister, whose wife, from some wretched feeling of superstition, caused the dog to be killed. May the mourners over her own grave be better treated! The source from which I received this anecdote leaves no doubt upon my mind as to its truth. I must own, indeed, that I am greatly inclined to believe all stories which exemplify the reasoning powers or the fidelity of dogs. However marvellous they may be, my own experience leads me to think that, although they may not be *probable*, at least they are *possible*.

The dog is peculiarly the friend and companion of man. In every country this is the case, and it has been so in every age. There is one use, however, to which they are put, the propriety of which I cannot admit, namely, that of being eaten. Being decidedly a carnivorous animal, the dog can never have been intended for our food; and those nations who eat dog's flesh, as the Chinese and certain of the American Indian tribes, appear to me to be guilty of a sort of cannibalism almost as bad as if they ate each other. Yet we read accounts of their being occasionally eaten in those countries by our own countrymen, and actually relished. Hunger, we all know, is a good sauce; and perhaps a young puppy may not be bad, though in all probability those travellers would have found an infant still more relishing. I confess that I have as little inclination to try the one experiment as the other.

There are two kinds of dogs which have been bred in much greater numbers since the rage for Highland shooting and deer-forests has become so strong—I mean the Highland deer-hound and the old bloodhound. The former is im-

mortalised in so many of Landseer's pictures that, although deer-stalking may be given up, the dog will for centuries be remembered; but the bloodhound is not so generally used for this sport as it might be. If greater trouble was taken in training bloodhounds to the tracking of wounded deer, this species of dog would be invaluable to the sportsman. But to effect this, it is absolutely necessary that they should be taught to track quietly whilst led. Almost every bloodhound pulls and strains on the collar, panting and struggling to get forward on the scent, until at last he becomes as blown and distressed as if he had run full speed all the time: and, indeed, more so. Besides which, as perfect silence is a *sine quâ non* in following up a wounded stag, your object will very probably be defeated. Train the bloodhound to keep pace with his leader, and to track silently and slowly, "*pari passu*," whatever scent he is put on, and he is then invaluable. Many instances of the extraordinary powers of scent displayed by this dog in following wounded animals have come under my observation, some of which would appear incredible.

A bloodhound is easily taught to follow the track of any stranger whose path he may come across on the mountain or elsewhere. This faculty alone makes this dog worthy of far more pains than are ever bestowed on him. Keepers seem to think that because he is called a bloodhound, and because bloodhounds, in former days, were used for tracking robbers and fugitives, that he requires no teaching to enable him to follow any track which he is set upon; and masters generally leave these things to their keepers, trusting implicitly to their verdict as to the capabilities of the dog. But this opinion is altogether erroneous. The bloodhound, to perform his duty perfectly, requires education, like every other dog. With a due degree of care, and frequent practice when young, a well-bred bloodhound will soon learn to track a man with unerring correctness.

An extraordinary instance of this faculty in a young bloodhound occurred some fifteen or sixteen years back in Worcestershire, for the truth of which I can vouch. At the house of a lady in the country, where a young, full-grown bloodhound was kept, the harness-room was robbed during the night. Some of the grooms, who found out the robbery at an early hour in the morning, having heard that bloodhounds would hunt men, took the dog out, and put him on

the footsteps, which at that hour were plainly visible on the dewy grass. The dog immediately took up the scent, the servants followed, and, after a run of twelve miles, came to a cottage, where both the thieves and the harness were discovered. It appeared that the thieves had waded through a tolerably broad but shallow stream: the dog scarcely came to a check here, the scent appearing to remain in the morning mists, which were still hanging on the surface of the water. He went straight across, and at once took up the scent on the opposite side of the river.

One of the most singular uses to which dogs are put is truffle hunting. I well remember, in my younger days, a curious old fellow in Sussex who gained his living, *ostensibly*, by this pursuit. Accompanied by four or five quaint-looking, currish poodles of a small size, he used to follow his trade, and generally hunted out a considerable number of these mysterious but excellent roots.

The Skye terrier, though so much prized by our English visitors, has by no means the determined, blind courage of the English bull-terrier. Nevertheless there is much quiet intelligence and character in this dog, and if well entered at vermin when young they are useful enough. Like all terriers, though eager hunters, they do not appear to hunt so much to *find* as to *kill*; and when in company with spaniels they are apt to leave the latter to search for the game, while they wait about the runs and outside the bushes, ready to spring upon whatever is started by the spaniels. I have always found this to be the case with my own Skye terriers, and have observed it in others. These dogs generally take the water freely and well, though I have had smooth bull-terriers better swimmers and divers than any rough dog I ever possessed.

Though dogs often disagree, and are jealous of each other at home, they generally make common cause against a stranger. Two of my dogs, who were such enemies and fought so constantly that I could not keep them in the same kennel, seemed to have compared notes, and to have found out that they had both of them been bullied by a large, powerful watch-dog belonging to a farmer in the neighbourhood. They suspended their own hostilities, and formed an alliance, and then they together assaulted the common enemy; and so well assisted each other, that although he was far stronger than both my dogs put together, he was so

fairly beaten and bullied, that he never again annoyed them or me by rushing out upon them as we passed by the place, as he had always been in the habit of doing before he received his drubbing.

Unluckily, dogs, like men, will grow old and deaf, and become a burthen to themselves and others. Life is then no longer a matter of enjoyment to them: and the most merciful thing to do is to have the poor animal shot. But we do not always practise what we preach; and although I am quite convinced that having a dog killed when old, infirm, and rheumatic is doing him a kindness, I could never bring myself to order the execution of any of my old canine friends.

Hanging a dog is barbarous; but when shot he can feel but little pain, and he will be in the paradise—the “happy hunting-grounds”—of dogs before he hears the report of the gun which sends him there, and he can have no anticipation, or only for a moment, of what is about to be done to him. I must admit, however, that I was once told, and by a credible person, an anecdote which went to impugn this theory. His dog having been convicted of sheep-killing, he told a man to shoot him the following morning. The dog was lying in the room at the time, and apparently listening to the conversation. Whether he understood it or not, I will not pretend to determine; but the very first time the door was open he bolted out, and never again came within reach of his old master. This seems rather a stretch of canine intelligence, but it was told me as a true story; and I am convinced that the relater, who was the master of the dog, believed it himself.

But I must close my chapter on this subject, as I shall become insufferably prolix.

WINTER SKETCHES.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Grouse ; Hardiness of—Difference of Climate in Morayshire—Migratory habits of Partridges—Grubs, &c., destroyed by Pheasants—Ptarmigan—Ptarmigan Shooting during Winter—An Expedition to the Mountains—Early start—Tracks of Otters—Otter-hunting—Stags—Herons—Golden-eyes—Wild Cat—Mallards—Tracks of Deer—Grey Crows—Eagle—Shepherd's hut—Braxy mutton—Ascent of the Mountain—Ptarmigan—Change in the weather—Dangerous Situation—Violent Snow-storm—Return home—Wild-duck shooting—Flapper-shooting.

GROUSE, although frequenting high and exposed situations, are perhaps less affected by a moderate fall of snow than partridges or any other game. A hardy and a mountain-bred bird, the grouse cares little for cold ; and although the hill-side may be covered with snow, by digging and burrowing he soon arrives at the heather, and thus obtains both food and shelter ; and in weather which makes the partridge cower and mope most disconsolately under any shelter it can find, the grouse-cock, with his well-clothed legs and feet, struts and crows on the cold snow apparently in full enjoyment of life and health. In this county of Moray the difference of climate between the hill-side and the flat lands near the salt-water bays is very great—greater, indeed, than would be supposed. Long after every trace of snow has disappeared from the fields near the bay of Findhorn, the country four or five miles to the southward, inland, is still deeply covered with it. The large fir plantations certainly create a mildness in the air which melts the snow in their immediate vicinity ; but beyond the extent of their influence the ground becomes colder and colder, and the snow deeper and deeper, every mile that we recede from the sea.

In October the summits of the higher mountains are generally clothed in snow, and frequently hills of a very moderate height are partially covered with it. As soon as this occurs, a great many partridges, black game, and wild-fowl of all descriptions migrate to their winter quarters.

Partridges are far more migratory in their habits than is generally supposed. Every winter several large unbroken coveys betake themselves on the first approach of storm and cold to the quiet and warm fields in the lower part of the

country; and when spring returns, pairs of partridges appear here and there, on every little patch of cultivated ground on the moors. These birds being almost entirely granivorous, always select cultivated districts—and indeed they only thrive where corn grows; but their actual consumption of corn is not great, for a partridge is a moderate eater, and in part feeds on the seeds of grasses and many weeds as well as on corn. I am confident, as I have before stated, that most, if not all, granivorous birds amply repay the farmer for their food by the quantity of weeds they destroy during a great part of the year. The pheasant is in a great degree an insectivorous bird, and feeds more on grubs, caterpillars, and other insects, than on corn; thereby relieving the farmer from a whole host of enemies whom he could in no other way get rid of.

During storms the ptarmigan burrow deep under the snow in search of shelter and food. These birds seldom descend far down the mountains, even in the severest weather. When only the summits are covered, they descend to the edge of the snow; but when the whole mountain is white, they do not leave it for the lower hills, but find what shelter they can by burrowing. Ptarmigan-shooting during winter is a most laborious sport, and is frequently attended with no small risk, owing to the snow concealing the numerous clefts and dangerous places which intersect the heights where these birds abound. The days, too, being short, and the changes of weather frequent, the ptarmigan-shooter must work carefully and quickly.

Some few years back, when living in the north of Scotland, I was anxious to get a few ptarmigan in their beautiful winter plumage, which is as pure a white as the snow itself. It was late in the season, and the ground was covered with snow; but as there had been a few days' frost, the walking was by no means bad; so I determined to start in spite of the cold and snow, and the grumblings of old Donald, who had but little inclination for the pursuit.

Our plan was to reach a shepherd's house, situated about ten or twelve miles—that is to say, about four hours' easy walking—up the course of the river; there we were to sleep, and to attack the ptarmigan on the following day—the mountain where I expected to find them being situated near the shepherd's house. At the first break of day Donald and I left the house, accompanied by one quiet dog, whose

personal inclinations tended rather to otter-hunting and such-like pursuits than to grouse-shooting; but his nose was so good and his intelligence so great that in cover-shooting and rough work he was invaluable. Pointers would have been useless for ptarmigan in the then state of the ground; and I also thought it not unlikely that we might fall in with the track of an otter or wild cat during our walk up the river side.

As soon as we emerged from the woods a beautiful sight opened to us; the morning sun, although not yet visible, tinged the mountain tops to the west, their snow-covered summits shining with all the varied colours of the rainbow: soon, however, the bright sun of a frosty winter's day rose behind us, making the old birch-trees which grew on the slopes above the river throw out their dark shadows on the snow. Here and there a roebuck or two "*stotted*" (to use Donald's favourite expression) over the turf wall into the shelter of the fir-woods, out of which we had just come; the grouse-cocks were crowing on the juniper-covered hillocks, which showed their lively green above the surrounding snow; and the black-cocks launched themselves off the birch-trees, where they seemed to have been awaiting the first rays of the morning sun. Everything around us was full of beauty; and dreary as a mountainous country is when covered with snow, still it is magnificent, varied, too, as it now was, by wood and water and numerous living creatures, all appearing to be in as full enjoyment of life as if it had been a genial morning in May instead of a most orthodox Christmas-like day. The grey crows were just going forth in pairs from the woods, calling to each other with loud ringing cries, and all bending their way straight to one point, where, as we afterwards found, two drowned sheep had been cast ashore in a bend of the river.

We walked on, and soon came across the tracks of two or three otters, where they had been going in and out of the water on their way up stream, after fishing in the deep pools where the two waters met near the house. These pools are favourite resting-places for salmon and sea-trout, and therefore are sure to be frequented by the otters.

Opposite to a strip of birch-trees one of the largest otters seemed to have left the river, and to have made for a well-known cairn of stones, where I had before found both marten-cat and otter. Half-way up the brae he had entered

a kind of cleft or hole, made by a small stream of water, which at this spot worked itself out of the depth of the earth. "He'll no stop in this," said Donald; "there's a vent twenty yards above, and I ken weel that he'll no stop till he is in the dry cairn forty yards higher up the brae." Nor was the old man far wrong, for we found where the otter had squeezed himself up to the surface of the ground again, leaving a small round hole in the snow. We carefully stopped up both entrances to this covered way, and then Donald went on with the dog to dislodge him from the cairn, having first given me the strongest injunctions to "*stand quite privately*," (i.e., quietly) a few yards from the hole which we had just stopped up. The dog at first seemed little inclined to leave me, but presently understanding the service upon which he was to be employed, he went off with Donald with right good-will, putting his nose every now and then into the tracks of the otter in the snow, as if to ascertain how long it was since the animal had been there.

They soon arrived at the cairn, which was of no great extent, and not composed of very heavy stones. After walking round it carefully, to see whether there were any tracks farther on, Donald sent on the dog, who almost immediately began to bark, and scratch at a part of the cairn. Donald was soon with him, and employed in moving the stones, having laid down his gun for that purpose, knowing that the otter was quite sure to make straight for the place where I was standing, if he could dislodge him. Presently the dog made a headlong dive into the snow and stones, but drew back as quickly with a sharp cry. In he went again, however, his blood now well up; but the otter's black head appeared at a different aperture, and now dog and man were dancing and tumbling about amongst the snow and stones like lunatics,—the otter darting from place to place, and showing his face first in one corner and then in another.

Donald found this would not do; so he again commenced moving the stones. Presently he called out to me, "Keep private, Sir! keep private! the brute is coming your gate!" *Private* I had kept from the moment he had stationed me, till my fingers and feet were nearly frozen. Donald seized the dog and held him to prevent his running in the way. All this passed in a moment, and I saw the snow heaving up above the otter, who was working through it like a mole; assisted, probably, by the heather, which prevented it from

being caked down in a solid mass, as would have been the case on a smooth field. I knew that he would appear at the hole which we had stopped; and therefore I did not risk a shot at him.

He worked on until he was close to the hole; when he emerged quietly and silently, and crept towards the well-known place of refuge. On finding it completely stopped up, the countenance of the poor animal assumed a most bewildered expression of astonishment and fear; and lifting himself up on his hind legs, he looked round to ascertain what had happened. On seeing me he made off towards the river, with as long leaps as the snow would allow him; and as it was tolerably hard, he got on pretty quickly till my charge of shot put an end to his journey.

The report of the gun started two fine stags, who had been feeding along the course of a small open rill which ran into the river just above where we were; and I was astonished to see the power with which these two great animals galloped up the hill, although they sank deep at every stride. When half-way up, they halted to look at us, and stood beautifully defined on the white snow; they then trotted quietly off till we lost sight of them over the summit of the hill. Donald in the meantime had carefully concealed the otter under the snow (marking the place by a small pyramid of stones), as I intended to have him skinned on our return home.

The lakes and the still pools being frozen, we saw several herons standing in their usual and characteristic attitude, waiting patiently in some shallow running water for any unwary trout that might pass within reach of their unerring bills: and here and there a heron who appeared to have made his morning meal was standing, as quietly and as unsubstantial-looking as his own shadow, perched on one foot on a stone in the middle of the stream. A golden-eye or two were diving earnestly and quickly in the quieter parts of the river, taking wing only on my near approach, and after flying some distance up the stream, coming back again over my head, making with their rapid pinions the peculiar clanging noise which distinguishes their flight from that of any other duck. They passed me unmolested, for had we killed them they would have been useless. Indeed no diving duck is fit to eat, with the exception perhaps of the pochard and scaup: and even these, although I have heard them much praised, are far inferior to mallard, widgeon, or teal, which are, in

my opinion, the only British ducks worth killing for the larder.

On leaving the birch woods the country became wild and dreary, and frequently we had no small difficulty in making our way along the trackless snow. The otters had turned off here and there from the river, and we saw no more of their footsteps. A wild cat had been hunting at one part of the banks, but had crossed where some stones raised above the water had enabled her to do so tolerably dry footed. Although not so unwilling to get wet as the domestic cat, this animal appears to avoid the water as much as possible; though I have known instances of their swimming rivers.

"We must try to get a brace of grouse or something to take up to the shepherd's," said my companion, "as you're no that fond of braxy, sir, and I doubt if we shall get any other 'ven-ni-son' there the night." "Indeed I am *not* fond of braxy," was my answer; "and a grouse or two we must get." But we had first to eat our luncheon, having breakfasted hastily at a very early hour, and we determined to perform this ceremony at a spring about a mile ahead of us; and as I remembered having frequently seen a pair or two of ducks about it in frosty weather, when we drew near the place we advanced with great care, keeping ourselves well concealed till within twenty yards of the spot. "Now, then, Donald, you look over the bank, and see if any ducks are feeding on the grass about the well. If there are, you shoot at them on the ground, and I will take them flying." Donald wormed himself on a little, regardless of filling his pockets with snow, and having looked cautiously over, beckoned to me to come nearer, which I did. "There are six bonny grey dukes feeding about the well, Sir; three drakes and three dukes." "Take care then, Donald, and get two or three of them in a line before you fire." After waiting a little with his gun pointed towards the place, Donald fired one barrel, and then as they rose the other. The latter killed none—"ut mos fuit." However, as only four rose (two of which, both mallards, fell to my two barrels), I presumed that he had done some execution with his first shot; and sure enough he had riddled two most effectually.

The place where the ducks had been feeding was a bright green spot in the midst of the snow, caused by the spreading of the waters of a fine unfreezing spring. Around it, also, were the tracks of several deer who had been cropping the

green herbage, and had evidently sunk to their knees at every step which they made in the soft ground. Two snipes also rose while we were picking up our ducks.

As we ascended higher the river grew more rapid, and was the only object in our view which was not perfectly white. Having finished our frugal luncheon, and swallowed a modicum of whisky, we again "took the road," as Donald was pleased to express it, although road there was none.

The grouse had entirely disappeared, and we saw no living creature except a pair of grey crows, who alighted under the bank of the the river. "There will be more of these fellows there," said I. "Deed ay, sir! do you mind those that we saw at first starting? they all came up this gate, and we've seen none of them. I'd like weel to get a good shot at them." We therefore went quietly on to the place, the crows being quite concealed from us by the bank. On looking over it cautiously, there they were, indeed, a whole flock of those most mischievous of all vermin. "Now then, Donald, take care, and kill all you can," said I. "Deed ay," was his answer, with a quiet chuckle. The next moment our four charges of shot were driving through the midst of the crows, and such a *family shot* at these cunning birds was not often made, as we killed or maimed no less than seven. But the next instant, to our mortification, a magnificent white-tailed eagle rose not twenty yards from us, out of the bed of the river, where he had been feeding on another drowned sheep which had grounded there. He was so gorged that he could scarcely get clear of the banks. After a few wheels, however, he got well launched, and was soon wending his way towards the cliffs of the mountain ahead of us. Donald almost wept with vexation, but for my own part I did not regret the escape of the noble bird so much.

Turning round a bend of the river, we came within sight of our resting place for the night, but it was still a long distance off. On the left, rising with a clear outline in the bright sky, was the lofty mountain where we intended to try for ptarmigan. The snow however looked so deep on it that we began to think we might as well have stopped at home. But I was very anxious to get a few birds in their pure winter plumage, and determined not to give in, if any chance of success offered itself. As we approached nearer to the shepherd's hut, the hill-sides, which were covered with fine old weeping-birch, presented a most beautiful appearance;

and here we saw a great many blackcocks, either perched on the leafless branches of the birch, or trying to make a scanty meal of the juniper-berries, which they contrived to get at here and there, where the snow was not so deep. I shot a couple of fine old birds as they flew over our heads from one side of the river to the other; and Donald missed several more, as shooting flying is decidedly not his forte.

Our approach had been observed from a distance, and the shepherd was ready to receive us. His wife, "on hospitable cares intent," hurried to and fro, piling peats and fir-roots on the fire. I had got wet at the spring where we killed the ducks, and my trousers, higher than my knees, were as hard as boards with the intense frost that had come on as the evening set in. However, "*Igne levatur hyems*"—I was soon thawed to a proper consistency, and immediately began to superintend the cooking of some of our game. In as short a time as possible a stew worthy of Meg Merrilies herself was prepared; but with true Highland taste Donald preferred, or pretended to prefer, some "braxy" mutton which the shepherd's wife set before him; the odour of which was enough to breed the plague or the cholera anywhere but in a Highland hut. "Deed, your honour," said the shepherd, "it's no that bad, considering we did not find the sheep for some days after it died, and the corbies had pulled it about a bit. The weather was gay and wet at the time, or it would not have had such a high flavour; but we steeped it a day or so, to get rid of the greenness of the meat." I thought to myself that, "*considering*" all this, together with the additional fact that the sheep had died of a kind of inward mortification, the bowels of Donald and the shepherd must be stronger even than the "*Dura illia messorum*" which we read of at school.

Our host was tolerably confident that we should manage to get a few ptarmigan if we started early, so as to make the most of the day, and if the snow continued hard. "But for a' that, it will be no easy travelling," was his final remark.

Before daylight I was up, and making my toilette by the light of a splinter of bog fir. The operation did not take long, nor did it extend beyond the most simple and necessary acts. The "gudewife" had prepared me rather an elaborate breakfast of porridge, tea, and certain undeniably good barley and oat cakes, flanked by the remains of my supper,

eggs, &c. As Donald seemed not to like the expedition, I left him at the hut, with strict injunctions to procure enough black game or grouse to form our supper and next day's breakfast. The shepherd took down a single-barrel gun, of prodigious length and calibre, tied together here and there with pieces of string; and having twisted his plaid round him, and lit his pipe, was ready to accompany me. So, having put up some luncheon in case we were out late, we started.

The sun was not up as we crossed the river on the stepping-stones which the shepherd had placed for that purpose, but very soon the mountain-tops were gilded by its rays, and before long it was shining brightly on our backs as we toiled up the steep hill-side. My companion, who knew exactly which was the easiest line to take, led the way; deeply covered with snow as the ground was, I should without his guidance have found it impossible to make my way up to the heights to which we were bound. "I'm no just liking the look of the day either, sir," was his remark, "but still I think it will hold up till near nicht; we should be in a bonny pass if it came on to drift while we were up yonder." "A bonny pass, indeed!" was my inward ejaculation. However, depending on his skill in the weather, and not expecting myself that any change would take place till nightfall, although an ominous-looking cloud concealed the upper part of the mountain, I went on with all confidence.

Our object was to reach a certain shoulder of the hill, not far from the summit, from which the snow had drifted when it first fell, leaving a tolerably-sized tract of bare stones, where we expected to find the ptarmigan basking in the bright winter sun. It was certainly hard work, and we felt little of the cold, as we laboured up the steep hill. Perseverance meets with its reward; and we did at last reach the desired spot, and almost immediately found a considerable pack of ptarmigan, of which we managed to kill four brace before they finally took their flight round a distant shoulder of the hill where it was impossible to follow them. An eagle dashed down at the flock of birds as they were just going out of our sight, but, as we saw him rise upwards again empty handed, he must have missed his aim.

By this time it was near mid-day, and the clouds were gathering on the mountain-top, and gradually approaching us. We had taken little note of the weather during our pursuit of the birds, but it was now forced on our attention by a

keen blast of wind which suddenly swept along the shoulder of the mountain, here and there lifting up the dry snow in clouds. "We must make our way homewards at once," said I. "Deed, ay! it will no be a canny night," was the shepherd's answer. Just as we were leaving the bare stones a brace of ptarmigan rose, one of which I knocked down: the bird fell on a part of the snow which sloped downwards towards a nearly perpendicular cliff of great height: the slope of the snow was not very great, so I ran to secure the bird, which was fluttering towards the precipice: the shepherd was some little distance behind me, lighting his everlasting pipe; but when he saw me in pursuit of the ptarmigan he shouted at me to stop: not exactly understanding him, I still ran after the bird, when suddenly I found the snow giving way with me, and sliding "en masse" towards the precipice. There was no time to hesitate, so, springing back with a power that only the emergency of the case could have given me, I struggled upwards again towards my companion. How I managed to escape I cannot tell, but in less time than it takes to write the words I had retraced my steps several yards, making use of my gun as a stick to keep myself from sliding back again towards the end of the cliff. The shepherd was too much alarmed to move, but stood for a moment speechless; then recollecting himself, he rushed forward to help me, holding out his long gun for me to take hold of. For my own part, I had no time to be afraid, and in a few moments was on terra firma, while a vast mass of snow which I had set in motion rolled like an avalanche over the precipice, carrying with it the unfortunate ptarmigan.

I cannot describe my sensations on seeing the danger which I had so narrowly escaped: however, no time was to be lost, and we descended the mountain at a far quicker rate than we had gone up it. The wind rose rapidly, moaning mournfully through the passes of the mountain, and frequently carrying with it dense showers of snow. The thickest of these showers, however, fell above where we were, and the wind still came from behind us, though gradually veering round in a manner which plainly showed us that it would be right ahead before we reached home. Every moment brought us lower, and we went merrily on, though with certain anxious glances occasionally to windward. Nor was our alarm unfounded, for just as we turned an angle of the mountain, which brought us within view of the shepherd's

house perched on the opposite hill-side, with a good hour's walk and the river between us and it, we were met by a blast of wind and a shower of snow, half drifting and half falling from the clouds, which took away our breath, and nearly blew us both backwards, shutting out the view of everything ten yards from our faces.

We stopped and looked at each other. "This is geyan sharp," said the shepherd, "but we must n't lose a moment's time, or we shall be smothered in the drift; so come on, sir:" and on we went. Bad as it was, we did not dare to stop for its abating, and having fortunately seen the cottage for a moment, we knew that our course for the present lay straight down the mountain. After struggling on for some time we came to a part of the ground which rather puzzled us, as instead of being a steep slope it was perfectly flat; a break, however, in the storm allowed us to see for a moment some of the birch trees on the opposite side of the river, which we judged were not far from our destination. The river itself we could not see, but the glimpse we had caught of the trees guided us for another start, and we went onwards as rapidly as we could, until the storm again closed round us with such violence that we could scarcely stand upright against it. We began now at times to hear the river, and we made straight for the sound, knowing that it must be crossed before we could reach home, and hoping to recognize some bend or rock in it which would guide us on our way.

At last we came to the flat valley through which the stream ran, but here the drift was tremendous, and it was with the utmost difficulty we got to the water's edge. When there, we were fairly puzzled by the changed aspect of everything; but suddenly the evening became lighter, and the drifting snow not quite so dense. We saw that we should soon be able to ascertain where we were, so we halted for a minute or two, stamping about to keep ourselves from freezing. My poor dog immediately crouched at our feet, and curling himself up laid down; in a few moments he was nearly covered with the snow: but the storm was evidently ceasing, at any rate for a short time, and very soon a small bit of blue sky appeared overhead, but in a moment it was again concealed by the flying shower. The next time, however, that the blue sky appeared, it was for a longer period, and the snow entirely ceased, allowing us to see our exact position; indeed we were very nearly opposite the house,

and within half a mile of it. The river had to be crossed, and it was impossible to find the stepping-stones: but no time was to be lost, as a fresh drift began to appear to windward; so in we went, and dashed through the stream, which was not much above knee-deep, excepting in certain spots, which we contrived to avoid. The poor dog was most unwilling at first to rise from his resting-place, but followed us well when once up.

We soon made our way to the house, and got there just as another storm came on, which lasted till after dark, and through which, in our tired state, we never could have made our way. Donald and the shepherd's family were in a state of great anxiety about us, knowing that there would have been no possible means of affording us assistance, had we been bewildered or wearied out upon the mountain. The shepherd himself was fairly knocked up, and could scarcely be prevailed upon to take either food or drink, or even to put off his frozen clothes, before flinging himself on his bed. For my own part I soon became as comfortable as possible, and slept as soundly and dreamlessly as such exercise only can make one do. I must candidly confess, however, that I made an inward vow against ptarmigan shooting again upon snow-covered mountains.

No person who has not been out in a snow-storm on lofty and exposed ground can form an idea of its force, and the difficulty there is in ploughing through the drifts and deep places; I certainly had no conception of what it was until that day. A change of weather came on during the night, and by noon the next day all was again bright and clear, and we reached home with little difficulty. The wind and drift had been much less severe near the house, and the tops of the trees were still covered with masses of snow, which the wind had not been powerful enough to dislodge.

Before the ice and snow break up on the higher grounds of the river, there is generally plenty of wild-fowl shooting about the open pools near the sea. At the commencement of snow the birds are usually tame enough to make the sport good, and with the assistance of my retriever I often bring home a heavy bagful of ducks, &c.; but without a retriever, and a good one too, wild-duck shooting is utterly useless anywhere.

In wild-fowl shooting more than in any other kind of sporting, a perfect knowledge of the ground and of the

different haunts of the birds is indispensable. The sportsman must make himself acquainted with their feeding-places, their drinking-places, their resting-places, and in fact with all their habits, at all hours and seasons, and during all changes of the weather: without this knowledge, which can only be acquired by experience and careful observation, the wild-duck shooter will brave the winter's cold and wind in vain.

A good sportsman, as regards other game, may live for many a long month in a country abounding with ducks without ever seeing one within shot. Continually when I ask people about the wild ducks in any particular neighbourhood, the answer I get is, "Oh, yes! there are plenty of ducks, but they always keep out at sea, and never come within reach." Now if there are plenty of ducks out at sea, it is a matter beyond all doubt that at certain hours there are plenty of ducks feeding inland; and about the time when my informant is dressing for *his* dinner, the wild ducks are flying to and fro in search of *theirs* in the stubble-fields, which they invariably do as soon as the sun sets, and the fields are deserted by the workmen and others.

As no bird is so easily scared from its usual haunts as the wild duck, all long and random shots ought to be avoided, as tending to frighten away the birds and to spoil all chance for some time to come in that spot. Ducks, too, are capricious, and changes of wind and weather induce them to fly in different directions and to feed in different fields; and, as I have already said, nothing but experience and observation can teach the sportsman how to be tolerably sure of filling his bag with these wary but excellent birds.

There is one kind of wild-duck shooting which appears to me to be the very lowest of all kinds of sporting, namely, that which is usually called "flapper shooting," which means murdering large numbers of young ducks by dint of dogs, guns, sticks, &c., at a time of the year when nine out of ten of these birds cannot fly, and are utterly helpless and unable to escape. A vast number of half-fledged birds may be slaughtered in this manner, but they are useless when obtained. For my own part I would quite as soon go out to kill young grouse in June or July before they could fly; nor do I see that killing "flappers" is at all less murderous or more excusable. In fact no wild ducks ought to be killed till they are strong enough on the wing to fly easily and

quickly ; nor are they worth killing for the larder until they have fed for some time in the stubble-fields, for till then their flesh is as muddy and soft as that of a coot or moorhen.

HIGHLAND SHEEP.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Introduction of Sheep into the Highlands—Aversion of Highlanders to Sheep; disliked by Deer also—Prophecy—Activity of black-faced Sheep; instincts of—Mountain Sheep in enclosures—The Plaid; uses of; various ways of wearing; manufactures of; invisible colours—Shepherds—Burning of Heather—Natural enemies of Sheep—Shepherds' Dogs—Origin of Dogs.

UNTIL within the last few years the Highlanders had a strong prejudice against the introduction of sheep on their mountains. Their dislike to this useful animal was founded on several causes. In the first place, the Celt dislikes *any* innovation or change in his old customs; in the next, he had a dread of clearances, *i.e.*, of small holdings being done away with, and merged in large farms; and he feared also that the black cattle, the former staple produce of the Scotch mountains, would be again forced to give way before these intruders; and I firmly believe that one of his greatest objections to the sheep was that the red deer have a strong dislike to the company and smell of the woolly strangers. I do not, however, conceive that this antipathy on the part of the deer arises from any aversion to the sheep themselves, but from a dread of their accompaniments—the shepherds, shepherds' dogs, and the tar, the odour of which appears to be most distasteful to all wild animals.

I remember, too, being gravely told by an ancient white-headed Celt that there was an old and undoubted prophecy to the purport, that the Highlands would be overrun and ruined by a race of "white dwarfs," and that this had now been fulfilled by the introduction of sheep.

When the Cheviot sheep first came into the North, the sheep-farmers brought with them for the most part their own shepherds from the lowlands, or rather from the borders; a fine stalwart race of men, Armstrongs, Elliots, Scotts, and others, whose names have long been famous among the wild and dreary hills which rise between Scotland and England:

formerly rieurs and harriers of other men's cattle and chattels, they now follow the more peaceful occupation of shepherds and drovers; and only occasionally show the fiery spirit of their hardy ancestors by breaking each other's heads at some border fair or market. But the genuine Highlander has not, I think, yet sobered down into a good shepherd; and the border men still form the most persevering and careful guardians of the large flocks which now fill all the northern mountains.

In most parts the border sheep, the Cheviot at least, have taken the place of the old black-faced breed, being more profitable in wool, and growing more quickly to a profitable size for the butcher. I must own to having a strong prejudice in favour of the picturesque little black-faced sheep, with their long wool and horns. Nothing, too, can be more adapted to our scenery than these animals; wild and active as goats, they scramble with the sure foot of a chamois over the most impracticable-looking rocks in search of some sheltered nook or shelf where the grass is early and green, or for refuge from any fancied danger. On the most impassible-looking and perpendicular face of a corrie, where there does not appear to be standing-room for a raven, the black-faced little fellows wind their way in single file in search of favourite spots of pasture.

A sheep, though correctly enough designated an animal "*patiens injuriæ*," is by no means without abundance of instinct and sense. Watchful to a degree, they are a constant annoyance to the deer-stalker, who loses many a shot by the object of his long and weary crawl and scramble being suddenly warned of its danger by the cry of the sheep, a loud sound between a hiss and a whistle. No sooner does the red-deer hear a sheep utter this warning cry than he starts to his feet as if he had heard a rifle-shot, and is off in an instant. Nor does the red-deer ever mistake the direction from which the danger is to be feared. Guided by the appearance of the sheep, he sees at once which way to go in order to avoid his unseen enemy.

Mountain sheep have a great foreknowledge of alterations in the weather; and I have frequently seen them changing their ground in a body before the commencement of a storm, which as yet was not foreseen by myself. Nevertheless the sheep-farmer occasionally suffers great loss by drifting storms of snow towards the end of winter, when the sheep are weak

and in poor condition. The length of time that sheep will exist under snow is astonishing, particularly when a number are buried together; the warmth of their breath and bodies keeping an open space round them sufficient for breathing-room. Floods occasionally carry them off from the low lands near the mountain streams; and yet they are by no means bad swimmers. I have seen black-faced sheep actually swim into a creek of the sea to escape the pursuit of a dog; but in rapid currents they soon get subdued and drowned.

Amongst other instances of sagacity in sheep, I have often been amused by the perfect knowledge which they have of the boundaries of the farm to which they belong. From being frequently driven back when found wandering, they soon learn the exact boundary lines within which they are left in peace both by the shepherd and his dog.

It is a mistake to suppose that the black-faced sheep taken from the mountains are so very difficult to keep in enclosed fields. In the case of my own small flock, which I keep for the use of my family, I find that if brought from the open mountain the sheep never attempt to get over the fences, and content with their improved keep, and unused to walls or palings, they do not seem to think it possible to get out of the field. If, however, they come from an *enclosed* farm, they generally have already found out that fences *can* be surmounted: and then nothing will keep them in; once out, they go straight off, wandering to considerable distances, sometimes, indeed, making direct for their former home. Broken walls and ill-kept palings have taught them the use of their legs, and this once learned, they are active enough to get over anything.

However wild the black-faced sheep may be when first brought down from the mountains, those which I had very soon became quite tame, and not only crowd round their daily barrows of turnips in the winter, snatching them out of the hand of the old man who feeds them, but soon, after a little shy coquetry, will eat biscuits and apples from the hands of the children, will follow them into the house, and sometimes become such pets, that their destined fate at the hands of the butcher is often deferred *sine die*.

Though Highlanders are scarcely yet reconciled to sheep as inhabitants of their mountains, they know full well how to benefit by that most useful product of their fleece—the plaid. Summer or winter, the Highlander will scarcely ever

stir out without his plaid, and numberless are the different modes in which he folds and wears it, so as best to suit all changes of temperature and weather. I have seen in a London paper an advertisement offering to teach young ladies the use of the "fan" in six lessons, for the moderate consideration of five guineas. Although it seems incredible that the fair advertiser can meet with pupils, yet it is clear she does, or she would never incur the expense of long and repeated advertisements. Now if some well-skilled wearer of the plaid were to commence business as teacher of the various ways and shapes in which its folds may be arranged both for picturesque effect and for utility, he would be far more deserving of encouragement than the five guinea teacher of the "use of the fan." The great advantage of a plaid over every other garment for the pedestrian, traveller, or sportsman, on the mountain side, is, that in sunshine and dry weather, folded in a rope-like twist round the body, it is no encumbrance, and can be so disposed as to be entirely out of the wearer's way, however much he may have occasion to move his arms. Should, however, a cutting blast or a cold rain come on, the plaid can be made to perform well all the offices of a cloak, either short or long, and one that will completely keep out a shower of any moderate duration. Very little rain is absorbed by a plaid if of good materials, tolerably new, and well put on. The drops run off the long wool; it takes a long time before it begins to soak through, and an hour's breeze dries it again.

I have shot through many a long day with a plaid round me, without feeling in the slightest degree encumbered by it, and knowing at the same time that it was always at hand, like a friend in need, to shelter myself and gun from the sudden squalls of wind and rain which are so frequent on the mountains during the autumn. When you are seated in a pass, waiting for roe, the trusty plaid is a most valuable friend; or when waiting for wild duck or swan, it covers you and your dog from the shower of sleet or snow, which would otherwise frequently oblige you to wend your way homewards, perhaps at the very moment when your chance for shots was the best.

The shepherd makes use of his plaid not only as a protection against cold and wet, but also as a pocket or bag in which to carry anything or everything he may wish to take with him: one end being sewn up, although it does not take

away from the general utility of the garment, forms a pocket of wondrous capacity, in which, without inconvenience to the wearer, no small amount of weight and bulk may be carried. The weakly lamb often is taken home in this warm receptacle, while the anxious ewe follows, bleating incessantly, but apparently with perfect confidence in the good intentions of her master. In fact, its uses are endless; and those, and those only, know its real value who have thoroughly learnt how to put it on, so as to suit all weathers, all states of the atmosphere, and, above all, the direction and power of the wind.

A good plaid is not, however, always to be bought at a shop; and unless the wool be new and well spun, and the fabric tight and regular, it will disappoint the wearer. When I speak of *new* wool, I mean that the wool of which the plaid is made should be new. But in these days, when all manufacturing processes are cheap, and the demand for woollen goods enormous, great quantities of old and worn-out clothes are ground, or rather *teased* up again, with machinery invented for the purpose, and are reweave into *new* cloth and plaiding. The worthlessness of all goods in which this renovated trash forms a considerable portion may easily be imagined.

I am inclined to think that in the smaller woollen manufactories such tricks are less easily and less frequently played. At the bonny and pleasant little town of Forres I have for many years had most excellent and trustworthy pieces of plaiding made for me of all degrees of fineness and coarseness; not only rough, coarse fabrics made of black-faced wool, for a winter dreadnought shooting coat, impervious to cold or wet, but also the finest and softest plaiding for ladies' dresses. Nor did I ever put any of my Forres-made stuff into the hands of a tailor, Scotch or English, without its being pronounced superlative of its kind.

Nothing is so invisible on the hill-side as the common shepherd's check of a small pattern. It forms a *tout ensemble* of an indistinct grey colour, which is most difficult to distinguish from a grey stone or rock; indeed, at a certain distance this kind of grey becomes almost invisible. I have tried many shades of colour, but never found anything so suited to purposes of concealment as the common small-sized black and white check.

Dressed in this kind of stuff, and sitting motionless against a rock, I have seen a roebuck, or even a red deer, approach

within a few yards of me without the least suspicion, although I was otherwise entirely unconcealed.

I am inclined to think that wild animals and birds judge by the outline far more than by the colour of any object, and immediately detect any change in the shape of an accustomed rock or bush; and hence it is so difficult to look over your place of ambush without being immediately discovered. Variations of colour alarm them much less, because all objects are perpetually changing their colour according as they are wet or dry, in sunshine or in shade. In wild-fowl shooting I have often observed that when placed even in front of a bush, I am not seen by the birds in the evening, but that, however dark it may be, they take alarm if I show the smallest part of my cap above the bush.

A Highland shepherd leads, or ought to lead, a most active life. If he perform his duty zealously, he has little time for idleness, for on a mountain sheep farm every season of the year demands constant attention and activity. Sheep have sometimes an obstinate preference for those parts of their pasturing ground which the shepherd particularly wishes to reserve for another part of the year. The fresh green grass which ought to be their food for the winter is equally attractive in the earlier part of the year; and they require to be constantly driven away from the tempting spots. Mountain sheep, when they have once found out a favourite piece of feeding-ground, be it grass or even the shepherd's own bit of oats, are most determined marauders. Although they are always ready, conscious of their guilt, to fly at the first distant appearance of the shepherd or his dog, they are equally eager to return the moment that the coast is clear. A skilful shepherd will always endeavour to make such arrangements as shall secure good feeding for his flock at all seasons. On the green banks of many mountain streams these animals can find food when the higher grounds are white with snow. There are long green stretches of this kind on the upper part of the Findhorn, enlivening with their brightness the dreary brown mountains of the Monaghleahd, through which the river flows. A certain portion of the heather should be burnt every season, so as to produce a fresh supply of young and tender shoots. On these fresh patches all animals delight to feed. The red deer comes from the far-off corries, where he has lain in quiet, rest, and solitude, to graze on the short, sweet plants of the young heather which spring up the first

season after the hill has been burnt, and nothing so perfectly suits the grouse as these patches. Short as the heather is, it is a region of abundance to these birds; and in rainy weather they take to the bare spots to escape the wet dropping off the higher and older plants.

Sheep, if allowed to do so, will feed so constantly on the newly-burnt heather as entirely to prevent its growing; and it is therefore necessary to keep them off for a certain time to prevent this evil. It happens frequently that by burning the heather when it is too dry, or owing to some carelessness on the part of the shepherd, the fire gets such power that it cannot be checked when required, and thus much damage is done, miles of hill are laid bare at once, and the advantage of having a constant succession of food coming on is lost. When once the fire becomes thus powerful, nothing stops it excepting heavy rain, or the accident of its burning in the direction of some stream wide enough to form a check to the devouring element. Plantations of considerable extent are sometimes burnt. In Strathspey this year (1848) a great loss occurred from this cause. Heather for miles in extent was burnt, and nearly a hundred acres of fine plantation were destroyed before the fire could be checked—a miniature imitation, in short, of the prairie burnings of the far West. A large heather-burning on a hill-side has a most picturesque appearance on a dark night, as the flames dance rapidly along the slopes, making the surrounding darkness appear still more deep. When the burnings occur too late in the season, and during the time that the grouse and black game have eggs, great destruction takes place, not of the eggs only, but of the parent birds; whereas judicious burning is advantageous equally to the sheep farmer and the grouse shooter, the same succession of heather of different ages being requisite for the well-being of both sheep and game.

The wild enemies of sheep in Scotland are daily and rapidly decreasing. A very few years ago, the sheep farmer sustained great loss from foxes, eagles, ravens, &c.: even the common grey crow will take to killing the new-born lambs, pecking out their eyes as soon as the little animals are dropped, and, if not killing them on the spot, leaving them to perish miserably. The foxes on some of the more inaccessible mountains still keep their ground, and in the lambing season do an immensity of damage, for this animal has the destructive inclination to kill not only as many as she requires for the food of her young

cubs, but every lamb which she can manage to get hold of, leaving the bodies on the ground, or slightly concealing them.

I imagine that all animals who, like foxes, hide a part of their prey, only return to this reserve of food in the case of their not being successful in their hunting for fresh game. All hiding birds and animals prefer feeding on a newly-killed prey, the blood of which is still warm. Sometimes, if driven by hunger or unsuccessful hunting, they return immediately and dig up what they had laid by: sometimes several days elapse before they return, and often the hidden bodies are never revisited at all.

Eagles kill a considerable number of lambs, carrying them up to their eyrie without difficulty; indeed a good shepherd, if he does his duty by his master, has constant employment in watching and guarding his charge. Without the aid of his dogs the best shepherd would be perfectly helpless on our extensive mountain ranges; in fact, without sheep-dogs the sheep would, in spite of all the shepherd's exertions, be everywhere, anywhere, nowhere: we should have to give up eating mutton, or to stalk and shoot the sheep like red deer. This is not a fanciful assertion, but would absolutely be the case. The very great sagacity of these dogs in their own line of business is perfectly astonishing; and I have frequently given up an hour or two of my grouse shooting to watch the manœuvres of a shepherd and his dogs, and have thought the time well bestowed.

Some of the breeds of the Scotch sheep-dog have a very strong resemblance to the wolf, so much so as to lead one to adopt the theory that the domestic dog, notwithstanding all its varieties of size, shape, and disposition, is derived originally from this animal. The wild dogs of Africa and India, who in packs hunt down the larger wild animals, and are said to worry to death even the lion and tiger, are adduced as disproving this supposition. But these wild dogs do not appear to be the indigenous and native denizens of the wilderness, but to have originated from domestic dogs who, having become ownerless, had turned wild. Although we all know that the wolf can seldom be tamed, some few well-authenticated instances prove that this animal sometimes entirely throws aside its natural bloodthirsty disposition. In the Edinburgh Zoological Gardens there is a fine large wolf who shows as unmistakable signs of gratitude and pleasure at being caressed as any spaniel could do.

The wolf and dog of the Arctic regions resemble each other so much in appearance as to induce casual observers to suppose that they are very nearly the same animal; but, notwithstanding this likeness, there seems to be the most deadly and relentless warfare carried on between the two animals.

The fox has in my opinion far less right than the wolf to claim affinity to the dog; at least the relationship must be much more remote.

GAME-DEALERS.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Poulterers' Shops—Supply of Game—Red Deer—Deer killed in the Fields—Roe—Grouse and Black Game; calling of—Shooting Hares by night—Pheasants—Advantages attending the sale of Game by the fair Sportsman and the Landed Proprietor—American Game—Wild Fowl in Shops—Bird Dealers in Leadenhall Market—Norway Game—Manner of collecting—Hybrids—Introduction of new species of Game into Britain—Prolific Birds—Sea-fowl; their breeding-places—Solon Geese—Migration of Fish.

IN these railroad-days, when carriage is so cheap and expeditious, the poulterers' and game-dealers' shops in most of the large towns of England and Scotland are supplied with game of every description in quantities that are quite astonishing. Red deer and roebucks are to be bought everywhere, and, I am sorry to say, at nearly all seasons. Having easy communication and constant dealings and interchanges with each other, the poulterers are able to supply to their customers almost any kind of game which may be asked for.

A red deer killed in Perthshire or Argyllshire, by the assistance of railway or steamboat is in Liverpool or Manchester long before he has been sufficiently kept to suit the palate of a civic epicure; and the poacher has such facilities in getting rid of his killed game that half the risk of his occupation is gone. The stag is scarcely cold before it is whisked off two counties away.

Considerable numbers of red deer are killed in the neighbourhood of preserved places and forests during the winter season. When his natural grazing becomes scarce, a stag, if

there be a turnip field within half a dozen miles of his haunts, is sure to find it out, and pay it nightly visits; at first, coming alone, but soon accompanied by a herd of followers, who do great damage to the farmer by trampling down and eating the turnips. The owner of the field, if he has so little of a Highlander about him as to be able to resist having a shot at the deer himself, is sure to have some hanger-on or acquaintance who will take the trouble off his hands: accordingly, when the moon is of a good age, a hole is dug in the middle of the field during the day-time, while the nightly marauders are miles away. Towards twilight the poacher conceals himself in this rough hiding-place; if there is snow on the ground he puts on a white cap and shirt over his other dress, and waits patiently till he hears the tread of the deer. Having fed with impunity more than once in the place, they come boldly and without hesitation into the midst of the field, scooping out the turnips with their teeth and breaking them to pieces with their sharp hoofs as they pass to and fro through the crop, playing and frequently fighting with each other. If the wind—that bugbear to deer-stalkers and deer-poachers—does not betray the presence of their enemy, it is more than probable that before many minutes are over some unfortunate stag comes close to the place of ambuscade, when he receives either a couple of bullets or a handful of slugs in the shoulder. Startled by the report, and not at the first moment knowing whence it comes, the rest of the deer are likely enough before they make off to collect in a group in the middle of the field, perhaps within a few yards of their hidden enemy. If so, another of the herd is probably killed, and the remainder rush off and do not return to the same tempting spot for some little time. Before daylight the hole is refilled, the dead game is taken away, and no traces remain of what has happened. Roe are constantly killed in the same manner, and are even caught in snares made of strong small rope.

Black game and grouse are obtained by the poachers in great numbers late in the season, by means, not only of tame call-birds of both sexes, but also by a call-pipe. However wild they may be and inaccessible to the fair sportsman, these birds can always be brought within shot by some means. A cock grouse on hearing the well-imitated call of the female immediately answers it, and, approaching by repeated short flights, stopping every now and then to crow as

if in defiance of any rivals, or to give warning of his coming, is soon killed. The female grouse is attracted in the same manner by an imitation of the call of the male.

So pugnacious a bird as a black-cock is very easy to call till he comes within shot of the concealed shooter: and indeed partridges and all other birds are attracted by those experienced in imitating their different notes in a manner and with a facility which is quite surprising to the uninitiated.

I am told that some poachers can even allure a hare within shot during a moonlight night by imitating the cry of one of its own species: this, however, is a fact for which I cannot vouch; but many poachers, from constant watching and following in silence these animals, acquire such a perfect knowledge of their habits, manner of calling to each other, &c., that I by no means deem it impossible.

Hares, like deer, travel considerable distances to obtain their favourite food, and are therefore easily killed by the nightly poacher, either by being snared or shot *en route*. Practice and natural keenness enable some of these fellows to get the animal to the summit of some rising ground, so that the clear sky shall be behind it, and they can thus shoot a hare on nights when there is no moonlight, and when an unpractised pair of eyes would be scarcely able to distinguish a house from a tree.

Pheasants are killed by snare and gun as easily as barn-door fowls would be: so that the unprincipled dealer in game has not the slightest difficulty in keeping his shop full enough to supply the demands of all customers at all seasons.

I can imagine no better system for sportsmen to adopt than that of underselling the poacher as much as they possibly can. In Scotland in particular, where the right to shoot game is bought, and very often at a high rate, I can see no reason whatever why the purchaser should not sell again what he has paid for. In recommending this to the renter of shooting-grounds, I only advocate his selling in a fair and liberal manner his overplus of game; not, of course, his hiring ground for the mere sake of traffic and gain: but even when this is the case the landlord has seldom much cause of complaint. In the first place he, the landlord, makes a traffic of his game by letting it; and in the second place the tenant, who in these commercial speculations is generally a permanent one, if he wishes to make money by the game must take care to preserve and increase it proportionably.

The custom of selling game is, I am glad to see, becoming very general amongst the principal proprietors. To the careless observer it may at first appear an unjust proceeding for the landlord to sell game which feeds on the farms of his tenants; but, practically, I scarcely know an instance where the latter are not most amply remunerated; indeed the farmer can legally claim indemnification if his landlord is so unjust and unwise as to refuse it. It should be remembered also, that although rabbits, hares, and deer undoubtedly do much damage to crops, all flying game are assistants rather than enemies to the farmer.

In many of our larger towns the game-shops are even supplied with birds from America, which are brought by the steamers *viâ* Liverpool. The ruffed grouse, a very beautiful bird, and excellent for the table, a smaller species of grouse, and even the far-famed canvas-backed duck, find their way over in these rapid vessels. The latter bird, however, does not seem likely to become a profitable article of commerce, as the price at which it is sold in America is greater than can be obtained for it in this country. Although the canvas-backed duck is a kind of pochard, yet, unlike our ducks of that species, it does not feed by diving, but almost wholly on the wild celery and other succulent plants; and this it is which gives its flesh the exquisite flavour so much praised by all who have eaten it. Excellent as our own mallards are when well fed in the corn-fields, the canvas-backed duck is undoubtedly far superior.

Besides the common eatable ducks, such as the mallard, the widgeon, and the teal, golden eyes, scaup ducks, scoters, and indeed every possible variety, are to be found in the large poulterers' shops: swans, geese of all kinds (the bernacle goose from Ireland principally, and the brent goose from almost all our coasts), are to be had in profusion: but these birds, and indeed all wild fowl, are so variable in their flavour, according to the feeding-ground they come from, that the careful buyer should always endeavour to learn where they have been killed.

Strange as it may appear, mergansers, goosanders, and all the fish-eating and rank-tasted birds, even including cormorants and sea-gulls, find consumers among the inhabitants of large towns, who are exceedingly omnivorous, and by no means over fastidious in their tastes; and so wide is the range of ornithological traffic in which the poulterers engage,

that the bird-stuffer and the collector of specimens cannot do better than make friends with them.

But beyond all other places, Leadenhall Market is the emporium to which the purchaser of rare birds and animals, living or dead, should betake himself. There is scarcely a quadruped, from a bear to a white mouse, or a bird, from a golden eagle to a long-tailed tomtit, which cannot be found there; and not a few of the dealers in these articles are themselves curious specimens of the genus homo, accustomed to deal with every description of customer, from the nobleman who wishes to add to his menagerie, or to the feathered tenants of his lake, to the organ boy who wants to purchase a dormouse or monkey. They are as shrewd as Scotchmen, and as keen bargainers as a Yorkshire horse-dealer: but although somewhat over-suspicious in making their purchases, and sadly deficient in elegance of manner and language, they are on the whole by no means bad fellows to deal with, if care be taken not to "rub them against the grain." Singing-birds, hawks, cats with brass collars and chains, ready got up for tabby-loving spinsters, Blenheim spaniels, and wicked-looking bull-dogs, pigeons, bantams, gold fish, in short every kind of bird or beast that was ever yet made a pet of is here to be bought, sold, and exchanged, and frequently the collector may obtain very rare and valuable specimens. Holland and Belgium supply great quantities of wild-fowl, canaries, carrier pigeons, &c.; and on a busy day the traffic in this division of Leadenhall Market is a most amusing sight.

One thing which especially surprises the visitor to this market is the total defiance of the game laws which all the dealers indulge in. There is scarcely a description of game which cannot be bought here at any season, legal or illegal; and it is difficult to understand how game laws and their penalties can be so openly and systematically infringed. Pheasants and pheasants' eggs, grouse and grouse eggs, &c., &c., are undisguisedly and unblushing sold at all seasons, in defiance of informers and magistrates. On asking how it happens that the dealers can supply game of all sorts at all seasons, you are gravely told "that it is all foreign game." Scotch grouse are called Norwegian grouse, and good English partridges and other game are libelled by being called Dutchmen or Frenchmen. It is certainly true that vast numbers of white grouse come from Norway. These birds as well as the capercailzie, are caught or shot as opportunity offers during

the winter, are subjected to the cold until they are thoroughly frozen, and are kept in that state until a full cargo is collected, or at least until a ship sails for London, Hull or some British port. Although perhaps as many as eighty capercailzies may come over in one ship, it is not to be inferred that these birds are so numerous as to allow of this number being killed in the course of a short time in one place. They are generally obtained in very small numbers. Each peasant brings in one or two: these are all bought up and "frozen" by one general dealer, who periodically, or as opportunity offers, send them to some poulterer in all-devouring England. The same system is carried on with regard to the Norwegian grouse or ptarmigan; the facility of freezing the birds enabling the dealers of that country to keep them until they have collected a sufficient number. A capercailzie killed in winter is to my taste scarcely eatable, owing to the strong flavour of turpentine which then pervades the flesh of the bird; I have, however, eaten one brought over in the year, and it was almost as well-tasted as any of our British game. It is to be hoped that in time we shall again see this noble kind of grouse tolerably common in the extensive plantations of fir and larch which are springing up on many of our Highland mountains which hitherto have been covered only by the heather.

Both in Scotland and Norway, wherever the capercailzie and blackcock inhabit the same district, hybrids between them are by no means uncommon. The difference of size between the male capercailzie and the grey-hen is very great; but the female of the former bird is much smaller than the male, being frequently very little larger than a full-grown blackcock. Both species, too being polygamous, their is a greater chance of their breeding together than of hybrids between the blackcock and the grouse, those birds always pairing. The blackcock is a perfect Turk in his domestic establishment, taking to himself as many wives as he can collect together, and keeping them by force of arms against all rivals.

In the recent reintroduction into Scotland of the capercailzie a spirited example has been set us; and there is no doubt than many other species of grouse and game birds might be naturalized in Britain. The ruffed grouse, for instance, and several other species from America, and also pheasants and other birds from the higher ranges of the Himalaya moun-

tains, would not only be ornamental but valuable additions to our woods and hills; nor can it be doubted that many of these beautiful birds would do well and increase in this climate, provided they were allowed for the first few years to breed and multiply undisturbed.

On considering the immense quantity of game and wild fowl which is daily exposed in poulterers' shops throughout the entire kingdom, the question naturally suggests itself, "Will not these birds be soon extirpated?" But, to all appearance, the supply continues amply to meet the demand year after year. By the beneficent arrangement of Providence all birds adapted for the food of man are far more prolific than the birds of prey, or than sea-gulls and those other birds the flesh cannot be eaten.

The nesting places of sea-gulls and some other kinds of water-fowl are curious things to see. The constant going to and fro, the screaming, and wheeling about of the old birds and the apparent confusion are perfectly wonderful. The *confusion* is, however, *only* apparent. Each guillemot and each razor-bill amongst the countless thousands flies straight to her own single egg, regardless of the crowds of other birds, and undeceived by the myriads of eggs which surround her. So, also, in the breeding-places of the black-headed and other gulls, every bird watches over and cares for her own nest—though the numbers are so great, and the tumult so excessive, that it is difficult to conceive how each gull can distinguish her own spotted eggs, placed in the midst of so many others, exactly similar in size, shape, and colour; and when at length the young are hatched and are swimming about on the loch, or crowded together on some grassy point, the old birds, as they come home from a distance with food, fly rapidly amidst thousands of young ones, exactly similar to their own, without even looking at them, until they find their own offspring, who, recognising their parents amongst all the other birds, receive the morsel, without any of the other hungry little creatures around attempting to dispute the prize, each waiting patiently for its own parent, in perfect confidence that its turn will come in due season.

The breeding rocks of the solan geese, the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth and Ailsa Craig on the west, will well repay the trouble of visiting them. Rows of the nests thickly cover the ground; and wild and wary as these birds are at other times, during the breeding season they will not

move from their nests until actually lifted off by the hand. The eider duck, peculiarly wild and shy as it is, is equally tame while sitting, allowing herself to be handled and her nest to be robbed, not of its eggs, but of the valuable down of which it is composed, without attempting to move from it.

It is a singularly interesting sight to witness a number of the solan geese fishing, on a calm day, in the Firth of Forth. Following the shoals of herring, these handsome birds dash one after the other into the water, with a force which is actually astonishing, coming up (and almost invariably with a herring in their bill) several yards from the place where they made the plunge. They do not rise to the surface gradually, like most divers, but suddenly like a cork, or as if their buoyancy equalled that of a bladder. The peculiar manner in which the skin of this bird is attached to the body, leaving large intervals where the flesh and skin seen scarcely at all connected, may give it this peculiar lightness, which to the spectator is extremely striking.

During the severe winter season the solan geese disappear from the Bass Rock, going no one knows where; but even at that season two or three fine warm days bring them all back again. Their abiding places are probably regulated more by the supply of food than by the weather.

I am by no means of opinion that either herring, salmon, or other so-called migratory fish, leave our coast during those seasons, when they disappear, or rather I should say, when they are not caught. I am more inclined to think that they always continue in the same neighbourhood, retiring only to the depths of the ocean, where they rest quietly, safe from nets, instead of betaking themselves, as the general opinion is, to the other end of the world.

FISHERIES.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Supply of fish in Scotland—Herring-fishery—Highlanders coming to Herring-fishing—Fishermen of east coast—Difference of Language in Nairn—Departure of Herring-boats; dangers to which they are exposed—Loss of Boats and Lives—Fishing in good weather—Loch fishing—Fishing Stations on west coast—Fishing for Haddocks, &c.—State of British Sea-fisheries.

THE northern seas and bays of Scotland swarm with fish to an almost unequalled extent; and although in many situations and districts considerable use is made of this bountiful provision of nature, it cannot be doubted that much greater benefit might be obtained from it.

As far as relates to commercial speculation the herring holds the first place, or nearly so. The fishermen on this eastern coast go out about the middle of July; previous to which they have been for some weeks employed in preparing their boats, overhauling their tackle, and engaging extra hands, generally Highlanders, who come down to the coast at this season in order to hire themselves to the owners of the boats for the six or eight weeks during which they are out at sea. These men earn during the season from three to six pounds, a perfect godsend to the poor fellows, whose eyes are seldom gladdened by the sight of hard money during the rest of the year. Just before the time when the herring boats go out, the roads are dotted with little groups of Highlanders, each man having a small parcel of necessaries tied up in a handkerchief and carried on a stick over his shoulder. They are sadly footsore and wayworn by the time they have traversed the island from the west coast. Being little accustomed for the most part to walking anywhere but on springy heather and turf, the hard roads try them severely. Most of them are undersized and bad specimens of the Celtic race. Very little English is spoken amongst them, as not one in ten understands a word of anything but Gaelic. When they have occasion to go into a road-side shop to purchase anything, or to ask a question, a consultation is first held amongst the party, and then the most learned in Saxon is deputed to act as spokesman, for there is scarcely any

Gaelic spoken along the east coasts, the fishermen in particular being almost wholly a foreign race of people, that is, not Highlanders. Some are English settlers, and some are descendants of Danes and other races who have originally been left by chance or choice on this coast. Their names are frequently Danish or Swedish. In fact they are altogether a different people from the Celtic inhabitants of the neighbouring mountains. There is an almost regular line drawn through the country, where the Gaelic language ends and the English commences. The town of Nairn is divided by this line, one half of the inhabitants being talkers of Gaelic, and the other speaking only English. It is said that one of our prime ministers boasted to a foreigner that his master, the King of England, possessed a town so extensive that the inhabitants of one end spoke a different language from those of the other end. Nairn was the town in question; and whatever the merit of the joke may be, it corroborates what I stated.

To return, however, to our Highland fishermen. Wearily and heavily the poor fellows labour along the road, and by the time they reach Forres, Nairn, and the other towns near the shore, they are sadly knocked up, their food during the journey having been poor and scanty, consisting generally of potatoes, and perhaps oatmeal, mixed up frequently with cold water, a sorry mess for a Highlander who is taking the unaccustomed exercise of tramping along a hard road. Many of these men know pretty well where, and by whom, they shall be hired, but others have to seek employment where they can. Their faces grow visibly shorter as soon as they are engaged: and they set to work, though possessing little seamanship, to assist in putting into order the nets, floats, stores, &c. In a few days every boat is afloat and ready. Then comes the parting-glass with their shore-staying friends, which, by the bye, is often multiplied until it amounts to a very fair allowance.

As the boats set sail from the small harbours and piers, the wives and families of the fishermen who belong to the place come down to see their relatives off; and many groups of weather-beaten women sit and watch the boats till out of sight, discussing anxiously the chances of a good or bad season, a matter of no light import to them, as their comfort during the rest of the year almost entirely depends upon it.

I have frequently seen some stout boy, strong and fearless,

but too young to be allowed to accompany his father, hide amongst the nets, sails, &c., in the boats, hoping to get taken out unobserved, till they were too far out at sea to send him back. The little fellows, however, seldom succeeded, and were generally chucked unceremoniously enough out of the boat, either on to the pier whilst the boat was passing alongside of it, or into some of the numerous haddock and other fishing boats which lie at anchor in the harbour.

The herring season, although a time of hard work to the men, is for the most part a time of rest to the women. Instead of having to tramp, as they shortly hope to do, miles into the country with a weight of fish on their back which would be almost a burthen for a donkey, they have little else to do than to gossip with each other, and set lines about the harbour and shores, excepting in those places where the herrings are cured, and put into casks for foreign consumption, where they are busy enough. The boats which go out from many of our small towns seldom return home again until the season is over; but leave the produce of their fishing at the curing stations every night if possible.

The herring fishermen have not only much hard work, but many dangers to contend with. Whilst far out at sea tending their nets during the night-time, storms of wind suddenly come on; and a scene of hurry and confusion ensues which can scarcely be imagined. Anxious to save their tackle and unwilling to lose any chance, the men in some boats are busily engaged hauling up their nets; other boats are driving past them with everything in confusion and their sails flapping in the wind. Others, manned by more prudent and able hands, who have foreseen the coming storm, are scudding with everything snug for the nearest port, and lucky are the boats which reach it without loss of tackle or life. Frequently by waiting too long, whilst endeavouring to save their nets, the poor herring fishers are placed in the utmost danger, and are driven helplessly out to sea, where they either toss about at the mercy of the winds and waves till the storm somewhat abates, or are swamped and lost, the men probably having been wearied out by their efforts to keep the boat's head straight to avoid shipping the broken waves which surround them. The crews, too, the chief part of whom are generally landsmen, or, at best, men accustomed only to the calm waters of the west coast lochs, become disheartened and useless at the hour of need, affording little assistance to the

"skipper" of the boat, who is probably the principal owner also, and who, if he saves his life, has the prospect before him of heavy loss or ruin. Many and many a herring boat founders this way at sea, her crew worn out by their exertions. At other times an inshore wind dashes the boats on the iron-bound coasts off which they have been fishing, and the crews perish before the eyes of their wives and families. Instances have occurred of a crew reaching some rock within a short distance of the shore, and within hearing of those assembled on the beach, who, after having vainly attempted to afford them assistance, see the poor fellows gradually washed off one by one as their strength fails them during the rise of the tide. There are but few harbours on the east coast into which the boats can run if caught in a storm and driven away from the safer parts of the coast. If a heavily-laden herring boat is overtaken by rough weather, it is very difficult to get rid of the cargo quickly enough to escape being swamped. In fact the throwing them overboard is a long operation: and sometimes when they have a lucky haul, they load until the gunwale of the boat is but a few inches above the water. In this case the shipping of a single wave is sufficient to swamp them. A cargo of large fish, such as cod or skate, may be thrown overboard with some degree of quickness—not so a cargo of herrings.

Although the months of July and August generally pass over without any very dangerous weather, September is frequently a season of sudden squalls and storms on our coasts.

This year, 1848, one of these sudden storms came on towards the end of the fishing season. It reached from the north coast to near Sunderland, beyond which place the wind was comparatively light. The boats had gone out with a gentle breeze, nor had there been any warning of bad weather; but before morning, on the east coast alone, more than a hundred fishermen were drowned, and the loss of boats, nets, &c., was immense. Nothing could be more melancholily significant of the havoc which that storm had caused than the fact of *one* fisherman bringing to his house *fifteen* blue bonnets, the owners of which must have all perished near the same spot. Fishermen are generally men with large families, and the numbers of widows and orphans left dependent on the charity of the world in these cases are always very great.

This is the gloomy side of the picture of herring fishing; but it has its bright one, for I do not know a more exhilarating sight than the fleets of herring boats standing out from all the larger towns between Wick and the Firth of Forth on a fine day during the fishing season. All along the coast where at other times the indolent habits of the fishermen are prominently seen, everything now evinces life, energy, and activity.

Hundreds of brown-sailed boats go out from some of the harbours at once, the place resounding with the loud but good-humoured greetings and jokes, from one boat to another, as they pass with all speed of sail and oar to the herring-grounds, each eager to be the first to reach the place so as to have choice of station. A fresh but gentle breeze takes them merrily out, and their nets are cast and fixed, buoyed up by their large round floats, or by what are much used in some places, prepared dogskins—a most unworthy fate for so noble animal. To make these floats they cut off the head, and take the whole body out at the aperture, leaving the skin otherwise entire. It is then dressed and tarred over. The neck is stopped up with a wooden plug made to fit it, and the skin having been thus rendered water-tight is filled with air, legs and all. So that the float consists of the entire dog minus his head. Blown up and extended as it is, and black with tar, it is about as ugly but as serviceable a float as can well be imagined.

The herring-nets being laid, the men, if the shoals do not appear to be on the move, set to work to fish for cod, halibut, &c., of which they frequently catch great numbers; earning in this way a considerable addition to their wages. Warned, however, by the cries and activity of the sea-birds, and by other well-understood signs, all at once they take up their lines, in order to attend to the main object of their fishing, and in a few minutes you see every boat hauling up the herrings which hang in the meshes of the nets, and glance like pieces of burnished silver as they break the surface of the water. Sometimes the dog-fish do great mischief, biting the herrings in two, and tearing the nets. When, however, all goes well, the nets are soon hauled in, and the fish disentangled from them as quickly as possible, and in a surprisingly short space of time all is made ready for another draught.

Sea-birds innumerable attend on the herring-boats, finding

it easier to pick up the dead fish, whether whole or in pieces, which fall into the water, than to dive after the living ones. The larger gulls eat immense quantities. I was assured that a black-backed gull has been seen to swallow five goodly-sized herrings in rapid succession. He was then so utterly gorged and unable to move that he was caught. All these flocks of birds enliven the scene—some, like the gannets, dashing down from a height into the calm water, and almost invariably catching a herring; others diving and attacking the shoals far down beneath the surface; while the gulls for the most part feed on the maimed and broken fish. Every bird, too, seems to be trying to scream louder than the rest, and such a Babel-like mixture of sounds can scarcely be heard anywhere else. Altogether it is a most interesting and animated scene, and to see it in perfection it is well worth while to take the trouble of passing a night in a herring-boat instead of in one's bed. In fact I can truly assert that two nights spent many years ago in herring-fishing have kept an honoured place in my memory, and are looked back to as among the most amusing of my out-door adventures.

A different mode of pursuing this fish is resorted to when the shoals take to the lochs or salt-water inlets on the west coast. The scene is then one of singular interest and beauty. The fishing is carried on in what looks like a calm fresh-water lake, winding far up into the mountains, which, overhanging the water, echo back with startling distinctness every sound which is uttered on its smooth surface. The picturesque rocks, dotted with noble old birch trees, with their weeping branches hanging like ladies' tresses over the deep water of the bay, and the grey mountain slopes above these, add a beauty to the scene which is so unexpected and so unusual an accompaniment to sea-fishing, that to be understood it must be seen. Hundreds of boats are actively employed in every direction; whilst larger vessels lie waiting to get their cargo of fish complete, and then stand out from the bay, winding round its numerous headlands until they can take advantage of a steady wind, blowing from some one certain point, instead of from two or three at once, as mountain winds always do. In addition to these vessels which are bound for Liverpool, Dublin, London, or elsewhere, there is the Government cruiser, distinguishable at once by its symmetry and neatness, lying near the mouth of the loch, with its tall mast and long yards, keeping order amongst the

thousands of men who are all rivals in the same pursuit and all eager for the best places, or what they consider as such. When she fires her morning and evening gun, or makes any other signal, the echo is repeated again and again loud and distinct, and then dies away with a rumbling noise like far-off thunder, as the sound penetrates up some distant glen. The deer feeding on the grassy burns of the corrie hear it, and lifting their heads, listen intently for some minutes to the strange sound, until, having made up their mind that it is not a matter that concerns them, they resume their grazing, only listening with increased watchfulness to every noise.

As the risks and expenses of carrying on the herring-fishings are large, so are the gains considerable, if the season is favourable and the fishing lucky.

It would be a very great assistance and cause of safety to the seamen on our northern and most frequented fishing stations had they the advantage of a few small steamboats, or tugs, such as we see in such numbers issuing out of the Tyne and other rivers of England grappling with great black colliers and traders several times as big as themselves, and carrying them off (as a black emmet does a blue-bottle fly) in spite of wind and tide.

One small steam-tug could tow a line, a perfect Alexandrian line, of herring-boats to and from their fishing stations; and in the event of an approaching storm, a change of wind, or other dangers, they would be of the greatest use in bringing home the boats, nets, &c., under circumstances in which, at present, much danger and much loss of life and property are sustained.

There is a general emigration from many of the western stations as soon as the herring season is over. Men, birds, beasts, and rats among the rest, all desert them. Of birds the number is very great: having assembled to feed on the refuse of the herrings, particularly at the curing stations, they now depart in all directions; whilst the rats have occasionally been seen migrating in large numbers from Wick and other places, and distributing themselves through the country, in order to change the fish diet, which they have for so many weeks luxuriated on, for a vegetable one. On the east coast, where the agricultural population is numerous, the refuse of the herrings is used in great quantities as manure, and being laid out in large heaps on the fields preparatory to being mixed with other substances, poison the air and attract great numbers of sea-gulls, who appear very willing to exchange fresh fish for that which is half rotten; but a sea-gull has a

most convenient and unfastidious appetite, thriving on anything that comes in his way.

The Highlanders who have assisted at the fishing on the east coast, now return home with heavier bundles and purses, but lighter hearts: however, I fear that many of the inhabitants of the fishing villages spend a great part of their hard-earned wages in whisky, instead of applying it to the comforts of their families. Some are more prudent, and lay the money by, in order that in due time they may become owners of a herring-boat themselves.

The inhabitants, at least the males, of fishing villages are an indolent-looking race, going about all their land occupations in a slow and lazy manner, and being for the most part remarkably ignorant. But we should bear in mind that they spend their nights at sea, in laborious and fatiguing occupation, exposed to cold and wet, and that it is only during their intervals of rest that we see them, when they are lounging about half asleep, and leaving to their wives the business of preparing their lines and selling the fish.

The coiling of a long line, with about three hundred hooks on it, is a mystery to the unpractised and uninitiated. Each haddock boat takes out coiled lines with from two to three thousand baited hooks upon them, and yet so perfectly and skilfully are they arranged that they never catch or entangle, but run out with as great certainty and ease as a ship's cable.

The haddock-fishing on the coast is carried on in smaller boats than the herring-fishing; each boat has, however, more hands on board, partly for the sake of rowing, and partly of working these long lines, or "*shooting*" them, as it is called.

The boats frequently run forty or fifty miles to set their haddock and cod lines; going from Nairn and the adjacent fishing villages over to Wick, where they are almost always sure of a plentiful supply of fish.

Trawling for flat fish has not yet been tried to any extent, but I have no doubt that it would be a most profitable and useful speculation. At present we get no soles, but occasionally some turbot are caught: for these, however, the demand is confined to a few of the neighbouring gentry; and consequently this kind of fishing is not much practised. A boat's crew does occasionally go out to fish for turbot, using a very simple and small kind of hang-net, and generally brings home a good supply.

Looking at the state of British sea-fisheries in general, it

appears to me undeniable that the advantage derived from this great and inexhaustible source of wealth is as nothing compared to what it might and ought to be. It is true that of late years some enterprising individuals have done, and are doing, a great deal towards improving this branch of commerce; and the speculations recently entered into for the more regular and more abundant supply of the southern markets will doubtless lead to more extensive competition and to improved methods of fishing; but Government might, I conceive, greatly promote this important branch of national industry by regulating the size and construction of the boats, which are often most miserably inefficient, encouraging the fishermen in every possible manner, affording them the protection and assistance of large vessels and steamers at different points, during the busiest times of the fishing season, expending sums of money in tackle, boats, &c., to be repaid or partly repaid by the fishermen, and also by having surveys made and soundings taken off many parts of the coast, in order to find out the banks and other feeding-places of the cod and other large fish. The Dogger Bank and all the principal fishing grounds have been discovered by chance; and it cannot be doubted that were a careful survey made, many other equally prolific localities would be found.

The fisherman would at once know, were they provided with plans of the different depths, &c., of the sea, where the best spots would be for fishing, according to the nature of the bottom, the currents, tides, &c. But they are quite unable to make these observations themselves, from want of proper boats, &c.; nor can a simple fisherman afford to spend weeks or days of fine weather in taking soundings and making systematic series of experiments; and hence it is, as I said before, our best fishing-banks have been found out by chance.

In short, our fisheries, by careful attention on the part of Government and by a very moderate outlay of public money, might be made the source of food and employment for thousands and tens of thousands more of our suffering population than are at present supported by them. The seas which surround our coasts contain an inexhaustible supply of wholesome and nutritious food, and nothing is required to render it largely available to all but a more efficient, systematic, and well-regulated mode of procuring it.

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